

SIGHT & SOUND

INTERNATIONAL FILM QUARTERLY • WINTER 1984/85 • £1.35 • \$3.50



**British Film
Year & The London
Film Festival**

**Robert Flaherty,
Ferry Radax, Michael Fitzgerald,
Chinese Changes & A Technology Update
'Gentlemen Prefer Blondes' &
Kurosawa's 'King Lear'**



CONTEMPORARY ON VIDEO

Certain selected feature films and many of the outstanding documentaries in the Contemporary Films Library are now available in Video format.

Cassettes can be hired for Group Video Viewing at special rates.

All video hirings must be booked through the Video Hire Department at Contemporary Films in Greek Street.

Videos available include:-

The films of **MERATA MITA**
NICK BROOMFIELD
BETTY WOLPERT

COURAGE TO LIVE
PATU!
SOLDIER GIRLS
FOR LOVE OR MONEY
NICARAGUAN JOURNEY
LOUSY LITTLE SIXPENCE

BICYCLE THIEVES
THE CHOSEN
MANGANINNIE
LA REGLE DU JEU

A VIDEO CATALOGUE
is now available and can be obtained from
Contemporary Films at the address below.

Manganinnie
Carry Greenham Home
The Chosen
Chicken Ranch
Bicycle Thieves

CONTEMPORARY FILMS LTD

55 Greek Street, London W1V 6DB

Tel: 01-434 2623 Cables: CONFILMS London W1 Telex: 298312 COFILM G

SIGHT & SOUND

INTERNATIONAL FILM QUARTERLY · WINTER 1984/85 · VOLUME 54 No 1

Editor: Penelope Houston

Associate Editor: John Pym

Designer: Don Hart

Publications Manager: John Smoker

SIGHT AND SOUND is an independent critical magazine sponsored and published by the British Film Institute. It is not an organ for the expression of official BFI policy: signed articles represent the views of their authors.



On the cover:
Amelia Shankley in
Gavin Millar's 'Dreamchild'.
Photo: Albert Clarke.

In the Picture London Market/Italian tax law/Venezuela/Eger/Moana with music/Venice/British Film/Julian Jebb and Ivor Montagu/Obituaries 1984. **2**

British Film Year John Howkins on the all-industry campaign to win back audiences for the cinema. **8**

Forward into British Film Year Mark Le Fanu offers some 'sideways and backwards reflections' on the aesthetic and realist leanings of some of the present generation of British film-makers. **9**

◀ **Bombs and Pol Pot** James Park on the intention of *The Killing Fields*, a positive British film on the Cambodian nightmare. **14**

A Soldier's Story Mike Bygrave visited the location of Norman Jewison's new film on racism in the United States Army of the 40s and asked about today's jobs for black performers. **17**

Turning on the Television Tap John Chittock reports on current developments in cable tv, satellites, DBS and video. **20**

Chinese Changes Tony Rayns charts the struggle for a 'new wave' in Hong Kong cinema, and its echoes in Beijing and Taipei. **24**

O'Connor, Lowry, Huston and Welles Richard Trainor interviewed independent producer Michael Fitzgerald about *Wise Blood*, *Under the Volcano* and Welles' forthcoming *Rocking the Cradle*. **31**

◀ **Double Takes** Heurtebise gives his blessing to Mike Leigh, finds a Cocteau connection and throws down a cleriheh challenge. **34**

Kurosawa's Lear **38**

Remembering Losey Richard Roud pays a personal tribute **40**

Looking at the Rubber Duck Nicolas Roeg talked to Richard Combs about François Truffaut and *Fahrenheit 451*. **43**

Gold Diggers of 1953 Jonathan Rosenbaum celebrates Hawks' *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, a musical which pleases and displeases . . . **45**

The Nostalgia of the Stalker Peter Green on Tarkovsky's *Stalker* and *Nostalghia* and the Russian director's search for 'home'. **50**

◀ **Ferry Radax at Ottenstein Castle** Catharina Blomberg on the singular talents of an Austrian original. **56**

The White Man's Burden In the centenary year of his birth, Brian Winston considers the example of Robert Flaherty. **58**

◀ **Film Reviews** Dance with a Stranger/Kaos/1984/Full Moon in Paris/Red Dawn/London Film Festival Report and Reviews. **62**

Book Reviews Learning to Dream/Travels in Greenland/John Grierson and the National Film Board. **71**

Letters **74**

On Now **76**

Copyright © 1985 by The British Film Institute. EDITORIAL OFFICES: British Film Institute, 127 Charing Cross Road, London WC2H 0EA. 01-437 4355. Telex: 27624. ADVERTISING OFFICE: T. G. Scott & Son Ltd, 30/32 Southampton Street, London WC2E 7HR. 01-240 2032. Entered as 2nd Class matter at the Post Office, New York, NY. Printed in England. Published and distributed in the USA by SIGHT AND SOUND. All American subscriptions and advertising enquiries should be directed to Eastern News Distributors Inc, 111 Eighth Avenue, New York, NY 10011.

London Market

A future bargaining-place for deregulated broadcasting?

Film and television markets are strange affairs. At their worst, they are tired get-togethers, embellished with seminars on 'The New Media and Visual Culture', staged at out-of-season hotels in European resort towns. At their most hectic, they are a modern equivalent of the Turkish bazaar, in which films and programmes take the place of carpets and herds of sheep. Almost by definition, there is no such thing as a 'good' market in the way that there are 'good' festivals: only the intellectual curiosity of seeing a new price barrier broken or a new piece of sales rhetoric invented redeems the curiosity of a visitor expecting something more than the haggling of buyers and sellers who have seen each other too often.

But the London market, having now lost its previous 'multi-media' tag, is an odd hybrid. Launched in 1982 by a group of sponsoring British companies with a little government help, the annual market is now a private venture, part-owned and run by Karol Kulik, a former National Film School teacher whose biography of Alexander Korda is probably unknown to the vast majority of the 2,000 executives who passed through the doors of the market at the Gloucester Hotel in October. Following a difficult first year, the venue changed in 1983. A relatively disappointing response that year made 1984 the make-or-break event. Now the market is set for 1985 and beyond, despite a consensus that—in strict sales terms—it is not worth attending a market where the hire of a display room, without video equipment, costs £2,184.

After 1983, nearly all the film companies which originally took part withdrew. At the 1984 event, the American TV network CBS said they would not be returning as exhibitors, leaving the American presence to a group of US sales agents for whom the London venue is a useful stepping-off point for Europe and the Far East. But their presence, augmented by a large contingent from Dutch and Scandinavian TV and from America's PBS stations, is not what keeps the event afloat. It is the British TV companies, eager to continue a home event, who are the life blood of the market.

But the actual business of the market, even for those British companies, is simply part of a sales operation that runs

throughout the year. Thames TV's *Trippler's Day* comedy, starring the late Leonard Rossiter; Channel 4's *Fairly Secret Army*; Central's 4-part *Ancient Lives* series on the Egyptians; the BBC's *Threads* nuclear movie; LWT's overpraised *Blue Money* comedy film starring Tim Curry; even Granada's John Fowles adaptation, *The Ebony Tower*, starring Laurence Olivier... all were simply 'headline' items in a trade whose rhythm is that of the factory conveyor belt, rather than the erratic gold prospecting of the film industry.

Somewhere in the snowdrift of new 'product' you could see little explosions of anticipation and excitement. ITC, the television and sales company once run by Lew Grade, were offering Neil Jordan's *Company of Wolves* and two new Larry Cohen films, *Blind Alley* and *Special Effects*. Tyne Tees, with three series of *The Tube* to their credit, were claiming, reasonably enough, to offer 'one of the most complete libraries of contemporary rock music in Europe.' And Arts International, the specialist opera and ballet film producers, were banging the drum for their dramatised *Puccini* by Tony Palmer (which in the event turned out to be as much of an aesthetic disaster as his *Wagner*).

But at a market where Rank were trying to flog more life out of the *Carry On* catalogue by selling half-hour compilations from the film series, the one major event was hardly registered amid the corridor chatter of the market floors. Only three weeks from the end of the market, Europe was to see the launch of its first major pay-TV system—the French Canalplus, available

to subscribers throughout France from 4 November 1984 as a scrambled transmitted signal. Telepictures, the leading American sales agent, admitted at the market to having sold 13 hours of their newest programming direct to Canalplus in preference to TF1 or the other French free-TV networks. In its small way, that deal signalled the radical changes which are likely to affect European broadcasting over the next few years, bringing American material and commercial values to television in a Europe where the tube has traditionally been run by the State. As the years pass, it will be interesting to see if the London market, which now depends so much on the attendance of state broadcasters, will become a bargaining-place for the warlords of deregulated broadcasting.

CHRIS AUTY

Italy

Tax-shelter film production, again...

In the golden days of Cinecittà, directors such as De Sica, Antonioni, Fellini and Visconti turned out films that were critically and commercially successful around the world. An average of 250 features a year was made in those days, many with budgets generous enough to secure the services of top performers. Recently, however, Italian production has ranged from 80 to 100 features a year. Few of these mainly low-budget films have been seen outside Italy and many have failed to earn back their original investment.

This melancholy picture may

be changed by a new tax law which the government is at present pushing through parliament. This year, for the first time, it is hoped, investors in Italian films will be able to shelter their money from taxation. Although details of the new law have not yet been announced, the bill's passage seems assured. 'The industry has long had a need for such a law,' said director Florestano Vancini, whose new film, *A Glassful of Snow*, is due out shortly. 'We must attract private investors if we are going to make better films. The tax-shelter legislation will free large sums of money here—as it did in Australia, Great Britain and Germany—and boost production in every respect.' The industry, he said, has been putting pressure on the government for years. 'In the last decade, box-office income from features has been reduced by two-thirds. Television took our audiences away and gave us very little in return.'

The state-run TV network RAI has been a source of production money, but it too has had financial problems recently, leading to project cutbacks. The government itself, through its ANICA production wing and the Banco del Lavoro, has recently been able to budget for only five films a year. Aid from the private sector, Vancini said, is the Italian cinema's one hope.

Fernando di Giamatteo, a leading critic and theoretician (Volume I of his *Universal Dictionary of Cinema* will be published in the spring), favours the tax-shelter bill but doubts whether it will solve the industry's crisis. 'I see the crisis as more cultural than economic,' he said. 'In my opinion, the country's film-makers have nothing to say. It's been twenty years since a really big talent emerged. Italian films have not been successful because, like society itself, they are empty, lost, superficial.'

Several industry figures agreed that Italian cinema must forge a new relationship with television, especially in the light of the recent proliferation of private, non-government channels. Most of these companies are producing little or no original programme material, settling instead for dubbed American sitcoms, soaps and feature films. And more feature films. One Sunday, for example, Rome's six stations offered a total of 19 feature films. On an average weekday, a dozen films are aired, including some theatrical releases less than a year old.

But relief may be at hand in this area too. 'Within a year,' Vancini said, 'the government intends to cut back the number of these stations, eliminating the fly-by-night enterprises. Also the biggest and the best private



Claudia Cardinale in Pasquale Squitieri's *Claretta*, one of several films about the Mussolini era.

station, Channel 5, has announced plans to produce seven films this year. They will be made for tv, but with decent budgets which could upgrade them into quality pictures.'

Vittorio De Sisti, one of Italy's leading tv directors, believes that the combination of tv and tax-shelter money will lead to a renaissance of Italian film. 'We now produce films on budgets of about \$400,000. After the tax law is passed, we should see these being doubled and trebled, at least.' He also believes extra money will go into marketing. 'At the moment nothing's left over when we quit shooting. Thus the public does not go to our films because it has never heard of them.'

The expected influx of tax-shelter money should also attract American and European film companies again to Cinecittà. The studio could use the business. In recent months only a handful of foreign-language features have been shot in Rome. They include *Lady Hawk*, directed by Richard Fleischer; *Red Sonja*, an English-speaking Dino De Laurentiis film; an HBO production of *Mussolini & Me*, starring Susan Sarandon and Anthony Hopkins; and a tv miniseries on the Medicis. On tap is yet another Mussolini story, NBC's *Il Duce* starring George C. Scott.

WILLARD MANUS

Venezuela

Four million dollars, seventy feature films . . .

In the midst of Venezuela's current economic crisis and austerity mood, the national film industry is booming. The cinema still offers probably the cheapest form of entertainment; it costs the equivalent of about one dollar, and that's considerably less than a drink of the nationally popular Scotch whisky. Venezuela has 900 cinemas with a total of 369,000 seats. This makes it the fourth-ranking Latin American nation in terms of seats to population. Also, movies here serve a youthful market; over 65 per cent of the population is under 24.

Most significantly for investment prospects, Venezuelan films have demonstrated their competitive potential on the national market during the last five years. While approximately 500 foreign films are imported annually and national production amounts to only about twenty films a year, this still accounts for 25 to 30 per cent of total box-office receipts.

Still, various problems beset this nascent industry. Most of the expensive technical equipment was imported from the United States before the fall of Vene-



Jacobo Penzo's *The House of Water*, about a Venezuelan poet of the early part of the century.

zuela's currency (in relation to the dollar) two years ago, but supply imports such as film processing chemicals are now very expensive. Additionally, Venezuela is perhaps the only country where two conglomerates monopolise over 85 per cent of the distribution and exhibition of all films. For maximising profits, they have traditionally promoted established box-office hits from abroad, but recently they have contributed towards production costs of national films.

The recently founded Venezuelan Chamber of Feature Length Producers (CAVEPROL) now co-ordinates the activities of film-makers and entrepreneurs who want to invest in movies. Other professional organisations include the Association of National Cinematographic Authors (ANAC), to which most director-producers belong. For more than ten years, ANAC campaigned for reforms in federal legislation to protect and promote the national film industry. Largely thanks to its efforts, a leap forward was made in 1981 with the creation of the Fund for Cinematic Promotion (FONCINE), which is associated with the federal Ministry of Development. FONCINE functions as a mixed public-private agency with representatives from professional and trade film associations and unions, as well as various federal agencies. Offering the basic credit mechanism for financing films, it also promotes them both domestically and abroad.

Part of FONCINE's funding comes from eight per cent of the theatres' total box-office gross (less municipal taxes). FONCINE supporters justify this by emphasising the growing pains of Venezuela's fledgling industry in competition with foreign imports, and the fact that unlike European film exporting countries, Venezuela has no

reciprocal quota agreements with other nations. Through FONCINE and previous agencies, the government has invested 45 million bolívares (about \$4 million at current exchange rates) to make 70 feature length films. Emphasising their low budgets, FONCINE executive and scriptwriter Edmundo Aray notes that 'this entire sum wouldn't cover one-fourth of the production costs of certain North American movies.' He adds that the 70 films have grossed 140 million bolívares at the box-office.

The public-private method of financing represents an unusual innovation in Latin America, where most national agencies for film support are entirely government-controlled. State authorities in some countries thus feel free to influence the socio-political message of films. German Carreño, promotion director for FONCINE, suggests that 'other Latin American film authorities marvel at the Venezuelan model because it allows complete freedom of expression.'

Yet FONCINE's crediting process, based primarily on screenplay reviews, has been criticised as defective for placing too much emphasis on the script. Much domestic criticism of Venezuelan films focuses on the larger issue of their socio-political messages. During the 1970s, many films took a left-leaning political view of poverty, social marginalisation, and other problems. Some people viewed this as an attack on Venezuela's cherished democratic government, which has survived since 1958. 'But if you want to live in a democracy,' director Mauricio Wallerstein maintains, 'you have to accept criticism.' More recently, film-makers have diversified their themes and approaches. Antonio Llerandi, who co-directed one of the most respected films in the prevailing genre of the 70s, comments that 'We're getting away

from this past format for artistic and economic reasons. My film *Goodbye Miami* (released in mid-1984) is more of a commercial venture.'

Venezuelan films are getting increasing screenings in New York, on the Spanish language tv channel in the US, and at European television and film festivals. 'Ultimately our success depends on an international market,' emphasises Roman Chabaud, Venezuela's most prolific director. 'And our films should be first rate. Would VIASA (the national airline) operate a technically flawed airline just because it comes from a developing nation?'

JOHN GALEY

Eger

Peter Bacsó in Marlboro country

Eger is a baroque jewel of a town some 130km north-east of Budapest. The town is famous for Bull's Blood and as the centre for the manufacture of Marlboro cigarettes in Eastern Europe. Many a baroque facade is embellished with the familiar logo claiming the existence of Marlboro country with all the lure of a goulash Western.

Every summer for the past eleven years the peace of Eger has been disturbed by the Summer University Course on Hungarian Film. The streets are hung with welcoming banners and for ten days the House of Youth becomes the focal point for a course that serves two functions. First, to examine one of the richest cinema cultures. Lectures are given by leading critics and informal discussions held with directors; the course is conducted in five languages—English, French, Russian, German and Hungarian. Secondly, to allow students from East and West Europe to exchange ideas and correct prejudices.

One East European told me that he had been excited about this course for over a year as he would be unable to visit the West until he was 65 and this, therefore, was a unique opportunity for him to meet young people from the other Europe. Questions were asked. Have you read *1984*? Is it true that Gorky is banned in Western Europe? Our communication was strengthened by the films we saw, and the points where we all laughed and the points where we did not increase our understanding of each other.

The 1984 school focused on the director Peter Bacsó, head of the Dialog Studio and best known in Britain for *The Witness*. Bacsó belongs to the 'bright wind' generation of Hungarian directors; so called because it was

hoped they would restructure the film industry after World War Two. His films screened at Eger included the early *Cyclists in Love* (summer holidays, sex and youth by the Balaton); *Present Indicative* (relations between a factory foreman and workers with not enough to do); *Piano in the Air* (satire on what happens when a concert pianist moves into a block of flats with tenants who do not appreciate his music). There was also the wildly unbelievable *Dashing Girls*, a musical about discontented women working in a tomato-bottling factory who are unable to resist the urge to break into song whenever they feel depressed by work, men or tomatoes—all this achieved with a score that lies unhappily between *Yentl* and *Evita*, plus the maximum footage of tomatoes.

The Witness, the most popular of the Bacsó films screened, exposes the lunatic excesses of a system that pressures a simple dyke-keeper to denounce as a traitor his old school friend, now a government minister, because he has fallen out of favour. The film was made in 1969 but not released theatrically in Hungary until 1981. It played in Budapest to full houses for two years. Bacsó's generation shared his desire not merely to act as a witness but rather as a critic sensitive to the difficulties of everyday life. But now, even with that generation of film-makers, that aim seems to be lost. The problem is that the public prefers Soviet thrillers or American romances to Hungarian films, and the response has been to make increasingly commercial

films that imitate the style of American mini-series. At Eger, Andras Kovacs declared that he was no longer interested in reality or injustice but that his aim was to make a commercially successful film.

Two very popular recent films have changed the attitude of Hungarians to Hungarian cinema. Bacsó's *O Bloody Life*, which follows the fortunes of an actress from the operetta who is forced to leave Budapest for the provinces, acknowledges the place of the most popular and most escapist art form in Hungary. *Stephen the King* is a rock opera directed by Gabor Koltay about the first Christian king of Hungary; for a Western audience it seems like a poor imitation of *Jesus Christ Superstar*, but for Hungarians it has made their early history accessible to a modern audience. Strangely, the other trend is towards faction documentaries, in which the director witnesses but does not interpret the life of market gardeners in Western Hungary.

Certain films screened at Eger testified to the fact that the voice of Hungarian cinema is not lost. *Job's Revolt*, directed by Imre Gyongyossy and Barna Kabay, deals with a child's interpretation of the persecution of Jews in Eastern Hungary during the latter interwar years. *Passing Fancy*, based on a story by Tibor Dery and directed by Gyula Maar, highlights the decadent fatalism of the Horthy regime. *Eskimo Woman Feels Cold*, directed by Janos Xantus, documents the rise of a punk rock singer who must choose between her career and her two lovers, a

concert pianist with a drink problem and a deaf-mute zoo keeper. Despite an improbable story line, the film works because it shows the aspirations and obsessions of Hungarian youth. The most moving film for me, however, was Marta Meszaros' *Diary for My Children*, shown at the London Festival, an intensely personal work which believes that by facing up to our historical past we can gather strength to face the future.

A friend when asked about the state of Hungarian cinema quoted Pasolini: 'Today is worse than yesterday but certainly better than tomorrow.' future films, I believe, prove him wrong.

HENRIETTA FOSTER

Moana with music

Film-maker Richard Leacock on the sound version of a classic

In the spring of 1946 I went with Robert Flaherty, his wife and collaborator Frances and Helen Van Dongen, his editor, to Abbeyville, Louisiana. We spent fourteen months filming together, to make *Louisiana Story*. Occasionally I had an assistant, and during the last four months Benjy Doeniger joined us to record sound. Visitors came and went, but essentially it was the quartet that filmed and filmed, month after month. It was hard work. We were up at five, shooting by six. In the evenings there were the chores to be seen to: take the cameras apart, clean them, unload the film, develop test strips at the tail of each roll, make 8 by 10 enlargements of each test, get ready for the next day, perhaps trim our boy star's hair, and finally, at about 11 pm, maybe a long, well-watered Scotch. It was during these rare, relaxed moments that Mr Flaherty would occasionally talk to me about filming, something he would much rather do than talk about.

The film Flaherty talked about most was the one I knew least about, *Moana*, which he had filmed in 1925 in Samoa, also a lengthy stay and a minute crew. It seemed that it was in the making of *Moana* that he worked out his conscious approach to film-making, his very novel use of long lenses, his construction of sequences that led you on by not showing too much, his view that visual tension was created by using the camera to conceal rather than always to show. I got the impression that he loved *Moana*, both as a film and as an experience.

Years later, I acquired, some-

what deviously, a personal 16mm print of *Moana*. I tried to demonstrate to students what Flaherty had told me. In doing this, I came to know the film well, though details elude me to this day. It was at about this time that I screened the film with Flaherty's daughter Monica. She was there with him when it was made, all of three years old. She remembered the evenings in the remote Samoan village (Safune) when the rushes, developed by Flaherty in an underground river, would be screened in the open at night, with the whole village reacting to what they saw and loving it.

Both Monica and I felt that there was something missing in this film. It was as if it had been shot as a sound film: the laughter, the singing, the dancing needed to be heard. When I have screened *Moana* to students, they sit in solemn silence and dutifully appreciate the film. It was not until Monica raised a little money and we went back to Safune with a borrowed projector and generator, when the whole village gathered to see the film, with Pea the little boy, now 65 years old, giving a word or two of commentary, that we fully realised the importance of the sounds. To these people there was no mystery. They knew the sounds that were needed and their reaction was wild: they laughed at all the little jokes that are there to be laughed with, they sang, they cheered.

Monica Flaherty has now completed the soundtrack for *Moana*, and I saw it recently. I had known from the start that the first few reels would benefit from sound and would work wonderfully, but I had serious doubts that anything could radically change the later sequences of tattooing, the kava ceremony and the dance. These scenes had never worked for me, and I was now astounded by them. Without changing a frame of what is I think as close as anyone will ever get to the original cut, Monica has brought these scenes to life and given them an impact that brings the film to a climactic ending, as was obviously intended. I am convinced that Flaherty would have loved it.

However, I have heard criticisms and rumours of criticism. In order to run the film at sound speed (24fps), it was necessary to 'stretch' it. This is done by printing every other frame twice, and does result in an apparent jerkiness in some scenes. Personally, I prefer this slight defect to the alternative of running the original fast, which destroys all the harmony of the movements and the flow of the editing. Naturally, the purist can prefer to see the film projected at silent speed (16fps) and forget the soundtrack.



Diary for My Children.

I have heard it said that Monica used 'Hawaiian music and songs'. This is simply not true. I was in Samoa when they were recorded. They are the songs sung in Samoa at the time the film was made, songs that Monica and her two older sisters learned and preserved and brought back to Samoa. As Monica herself points out, this music was heavily influenced by the missionaries of the period. She also points out that she has consulted the leading ethnomusicologists, and there is no trace of any 'more authentic' music anywhere.

These kinds of criticisms plagued Flaherty's career. Margaret Mead's troops carped at *Moana* as not representing the 'true' Samoan family. I note that it is now her turn to come under fire. So be it. I am not an ethnologist; nor was Robert Flaherty. He was a fabulous human being and one of the greatest artists the cinema has produced. Every single activity that you see in this film I saw taking place today in Samoa. I welcome this new version, and I salute Monica Flaherty.

RICHARD LEACOCK

Venice

A hypnotic German saga

Competition among British buyers at the 1984 Venice Festival was fast and sharp. There were large fish to be landed, and the largest was, by almost universal consent, Edgar Reitz's 16-hour epic *Heimat*, which the BBC secured for the reported knock-down price of £250,000. The critical response to this intense, obsessive, boldly innovative saga of a large German family from a small town in Hunsrück from 1919 to the present was slow to build. But as time passed, and one secured the daily four-hour fix, the experience became both affecting and hypnotic. Could one talk of anything else? At the end of the epilogue, with its extraordinary, unadorned other-world reunion, the cast, slightly bewildered by all the fuss, was introduced. The response was as tumultuous and sustained as any I have heard in a cinema. *Heimat* will be the tv event of the year.

Other outstanding films of the festival's second week were Paolo and Vittorio Taviani's *Kaos* and Eric Rohmer's *Les Nuits de la Pleine Lune* (both reviewed in this issue). Opinion was divided about the Tavianis' adaptation of a volume of Pirandello stories, all set in the author's beautiful but unforgiving native Sicily, but it seemed to me (and several Italian critics: 'At last the Tavianis have produced a masterpiece') to be the brothers' best film to date.



Heimat: Joseph Jones, Dieter Schaad.

The pleasures of the Rohmer were less surprising but no less intense. *Kaos* ends with a shot of a family of children sliding down a mountain and, with a great billowing of skirts, into the Mediterranean. The sheerly cinematic excitement of Rohmer's latest in the 'Comédies et Proverbes' series, however, derives from the pared symmetry of the story: 'He who has two women loses his soul/He who has two houses loses his reason.' Pascale Ogier, who plays the impossible young woman shuttling between two men and two homes, designed the decors (with Mondrian as her guide): the effect, as well as being coolly beautiful, works to startling dramatic effect when the girl, trapped in her perfect grey *piéd à terre*, suddenly finds herself stifled by her own arid perfectionism. The characters will strike some as perhaps even more irksome than Pauline and her companions; but Rohmer's gaze is as level and amused as ever.

Alain Resnais' *L'Amour à Mort* was as bizarre and singular as anything at Venice. It struck me, however, as a peculiarly detached as well as a peculiarly passionate philosophical argument on the dictates of love and the sometime necessity of suicide. An archaeologist (Pierre Arditi) collapses and dies, to the dismay of his love of a few months (Sabine Azéma). He is allowed back across the river of death; but then after a brief reprieve, during which he is consumed with uncertainty, she with worry, he dies again, this time once and for all. Their friends, a husband and wife team of Protestant ministers (Fanny Ardant and André Dussolier),

then counsel and console the bereaved woman, who is determined to rejoin her love.

Written by Jean Gruault and photographed by Sacha Vierny, the film, like its punning title, is a shade too carefully composed, the arguments—which seem to end by endorsing the transcendence of romantic love—a shade too schematic. Colour is laid on in symbolic swatches and from time to time the screen goes blue and is filled with snowflakes (or perhaps stars) of varying intensity. This punctuating device seemed to be an index of the intensity of communication between the characters; but it was clearly much more than this, in fact so much more that, abetted by the cosmic music of Hans Werner Henze and the Fires of London, it came to exercise an obsessive fascination. Unlike the rat heads which cropped up in *Mon Oncle d'Amérique*, which one could take or leave, the snow-filled screen seemed at times as haunting as the glass ball dropped from the hand of the dying Kane.

After all the recent tinkering with Bizet's *Carmen*, it was a relief to find in Francesco Rosi's film the opera opened out into the streets of Ronda and the Andalusian countryside, but mounted straight. The matador Antonio Ordóñez prepares to kill a bull as the overture begins; and then as the sword goes in the music swells triumphantly. The production hardly takes breath from then on. Julia Migenes Johnson is a tigerish Carmen, Plácido Domingo a suitably hapless Don José and Ruggero Raimondi a truly matadorish Escamillo. Lorin Maazel conducted the Orchestre National de

France; and Pasqualino De Santis was the director of photography. The big scenes, such as Escamillo's night entry into the gypsy camp and his final progress across the bullring, were spectacles fully complementing the music.

The numbing, despairing quality of life in Turkey was once again born witness to in Erden Kiral's *Der Spiegel* (co-financed by Channel 4). The younger brother of a feudal landlord pays court to the terrified wife of one of the family's bondsmen: she is bewitched by the gift of a mirror (she has never, it appears, seen a reflection of her face); the husband slaughters his 'rival' as though a life, when honour was at stake, meant absolutely nothing, and buries him beneath the stall of his sole possession, a white ox; the stall is part of the couple's one-room home; claustrophobia, guilt and misery lead inevitably to another killing. The film's effect is rather like a hammer blow to the head.

An otherwise reasonably unruffled Venice Festival ended with a furore over the inclusion in the competition of Pasquale Squitieri's *Claretta*, which some members of the jury, including Günter Grass, Erland Josephson and Yevgeny Yevtushenko, saw as displaying, in its nostalgic story of the fidelity of Mussolini's mistress Clara Petacci, alarming fascist tendencies. The protesting jurors were rounded on from the floor; and the daily press went away with an extra paragraph to the story that Zanussi's *The Year of the Quiet Sun*, a Polish-German co-production about the lure of exile, took the grand prix.

JOHN PYM

British Film

Four hundred titles at New York's Museum of Modern Art

By March, when British Film Year's roadshow and space-age modules will be warming up for their domestic and overseas promotional tours, the first section of another—and already highly popular—'British Film Year' will be winding down at New York's Museum of Modern Art. 'British Film', the largest and most ambitious season yet mounted by the Museum's Department of Film (in all some 400 titles will be screened), was launched at a gala evening in October in the newly renovated Roy and Niuta Titus theatre.

The season has long been planned, and several times delayed by the Museum's extensive and none too smooth rebuilding programme, but now fittingly falls on the 50th anniversary of both its sponsors, the MDF and our own National Film Archive. (The chief underwriters are Pearson, Goldcrest Films and Television and Thorn EMI.) Alec Guinness was on hand at the inauguration to introduce (as he had done thirty-five years ago when it opened in New York) *Kind Hearts* and *Coronets*, which headed the season's current cycle of films focusing on Michael Balcon and his 'pursuit of British cinema'.

Geoff Brown begins his keynote essay in the Museum's accompanying Balcon book: 'Once upon a time there was a true doughty knight of the British cinema...' then adds, after sketching his achievements, 'Sir Balcon only fell down, perhaps, in rescuing damsels in distress: few damsels resided at Ealing Castle, with the principal exception of Princess Googie Withers. It was a happy life until the dastardly Baron Television robbed Sir Balcon of his castle in 1955...' The dastardly Baron has not, however, satisfied the appetite of New York's anglophile filmgoers, who, it is reported, have been packing the houses and who have, according to Brown, elevated the actress Jessie Matthews to the status of 'semi-divine'. Among the particularly appreciated early offerings has been Alfred Hitchcock's *The Pleasure Garden* (1926), with its American stars, Virginia Valli and Carmelita Geraghty, German studio work and Italian locations. Most of the films, like this restored print, have been supplied by the National Film Archive.

At the opening evening, Sir Alec gracefully deprecated Lillian Gish's flowery and booming praise of his talents and then went on

to make a brief speech about *Kind Hearts*, which included a tribute to Robert Hamer, its director, and a note that this was the first of Ealing's blackish comedies. The idea of the eight famous parts had been Guinness', in a frivolous moment; T. S. Eliot had considered the film reprehensible but thoroughly enjoyable. Sir Alec hoped (in vain, as it turned out) that the scroll presented him by Helen Hayes when he first introduced the film, and which he had unwisely given to a stranger in the audience, never to be seen again, might have been returned to him by the Museum. The audience purred with delight.

The second part of the season will trace the various threads running through the history of British film: realism, music hall, melodrama, theatrical adaptations, from 1913 to 1983. 'British Film' is dedicated to Iris Barry, born in Birmingham, who joined the Museum of Modern Art in 1932 and was its first curator of film.

JOHN PYM

In Memoriam

Ivor Montagu and Julian Jebb

It was shocking to learn on Guy Fawkes day 1984 of the deaths of two valued contributors to this magazine.

Ivor Montagu died on 5 November, aged 80. His last contribution to *SIGHT AND SOUND*, in the Summer 1984 issue, was a review, characteristically enthusiastic and generous, of Jay Leyda and Zina Voynow's book on Eisenstein. As usual, his copy was written in a minute and none

too immediately legible hand on numerous small sheets of paper torn from a note pad. The deciphering of Ivor's contributions was something of an art in itself; more satisfying than the delivery of some immaculately typed manuscripts.

Three months earlier, we published an uncommonly spirited interview, on the occasion of his eightieth birthday, in which he talked to Geoff Brown about aspects of his long and remarkable career in films. He wouldn't allow the interviewer to switch on his tape-recorder; hardly necessary, in this case, since one was not likely to forget the detail of his conversation. When the April *SIGHT AND SOUND* was published, he came to a lunch at the NFI along with Lord Bernstein, a co-founder with him more than half a century ago of the Film Society. On that occasion, the talk ranged over the conduct of mosquitoes, the history of table-tennis in Britain, the founding of the Progressive Film Institute (a short-lived 1930s venture, which he launched partly in reaction against what he saw as fascist tendencies in the BFI of the day), his own 20s films, almost home movies, made with Charles Laughton and Elsa Lanchester, and an early venture into vegetarianism, which ended abruptly when Bernard Shaw, unaware that he was entertaining a fellow vegetarian, served him a cutlet for lunch, and the schoolboy Montagu was too shy to do anything but eat it.

If the conversation had taken another turn, he could have talked with equal verve and authority about Eisenstein, small mammals, Edwardian England, the Communist Party of Great Britain and, of course, Hitchcock.

It was over lunch at the Café Royal that Michael Balcon is said to have asked Ivor Montagu, himself a young recruit to films, what could be done to save *The Lodger*, then in post-production and thought to be in need of some resuscitation. Over the years, Ivor Montagu's role in films often seemed like that of an inspired odd-job man. He and his wife Eileen (Hell), who died in early October, will be greatly missed.

So will Julian Jebb, who had his own Edwardian connection (as a grandson of Hilaire Belloc), and who was also a Cambridge graduate. Coincidentally, the last piece Julian Jebb wrote for us, a review of Fellini's *And the Ship Sailed On*, also appeared in Summer 1984. Only days before his own death, on 31 October, he was on the telephone mourning the death of François Truffaut, whom he had never met but whose films he loved almost beyond reason. In his contribution to *SIGHT AND SOUND*'s 1982 Top Ten feature, he listed four films by Truffaut, along with works by Rohmer, Demy, Antonioni, Bergman, Fellini and the Marx Brothers.

Julian Jebb was one of those critics, more common perhaps than the world at large recognises, who preferred writing about films he admired. He was a graceful, stylish reviewer of books and films; perhaps an even better talker about them. His own films for the BBC included features on Virginia Woolf and on the Mitfords, portraits presented with elegance and wit but also pertinaciously researched. With Gavin Millar, he worked for some time on *Arena—Cinema*, still the most consistently alert and intelligent of television's several attempts to cope with the problem of how to talk on the small screen about the large one. Television's arts departments need people with his particular talents; the stock is sadly diminished.

PENELOPE HOUSTON

1984 Obituary

NOVEMBER 1983: Robert (Bobby) Agnew, juvenile lead of silent films, for King Vidor (*Wine of Youth*) and others; Christopher George, the affable gunman of *El Dorado*.

DECEMBER 1983: Hal Pereira, supervising art director (*Shane*, *Funny Face*); Robert Aldrich; Slim Pickens, Western sidekick and rodeo star, who bucked an atomic bomb to glory in *Dr Strangelove*; Grigori Alexandrov, associate of Eisenstein, then director in his own right (*The Jazz Comedy*, *Volga-Volga*); Rod Cameron, mainly hero of numerous support-



Ivor Montagu and Lord Bernstein. Photo: Mike Wessen.

ing programmes; Paul Gégauff, writer of many scripts for Chabrol, murdered on Christmas Day in circumstances that might have come from one of his own screenplays; William Demarest, versatile actor whose talents were best appreciated by Preston Sturges (*Hail the Conquering Hero*, *The Miracle of Morgan's Creek*).

JANUARY: Ernest Laszlo, one of Aldrich's favourite cameramen (*Kiss Me Deadly*, *4 for Texas*); Jack LaRue, brutal-faced heavy (*Story of Temple Drake*, *No Orchids for Miss Blandish*); Johnny Weissmuller, unsurpassed among screen Tarzans; Roger Blin, famous name of the French stage who made frequent film appearances (*Entrée des Artistes*, *Orphée*); Walter Herndon, production designer (*Conrack*, *Sharky's Machine*); Douglas Camfield, director for British television, from *Z Cars* to *Shoestring*; Frances Goodrich, scriptwriter, invariably in collaboration with husband Albert Hackett (*It's a Wonderful Life*, *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers*).

FEBRUARY: George Elvin, General Secretary of the ACTT 1934-69, its President 1969-72; Ascanio Branca, managing director of the UK arm of 20th Century-Fox; Georges Wakhevitch, distinguished art director for Renoir, Cocteau, Peter Brook; Ethel Merman, energetic singer-comedienne (*Kid Millions*, *Call Me Madam*); Lewis J. Rachmil, producer (*Human Desire*, *Hawaii*); Robert Odell, art director at Paramount (*Alice in Wonderland*, *Beau Geste*); Roland Culver, practised player of aristocratic Britishers (*French Without Tears*, *On Approval*).

MARCH: Jackie Coogan, Chaplin's Kid, subsequently portly supporting actor; William Powell, dapper lead of the *Thin Man* series; Henry Wilcoxon, protégé of Cecil B. DeMille, as actor (*Cleopatra*) and producer (*The Buccaneer*); Paul Rotha, documentarist, independent film-maker and cantankerous writer on cinema; Hannah Weinstein, producer of Anglo-American TV series in the 1950s, providing a haven for numerous pseudonymous refugees from the blacklist, latterly in Hollywood producing primarily black subjects (*Claudine*, *Stir Crazy*); I. S. Johar, Indian actor (*Ek Thi Ladkhi*, *Northwest Frontier*); Richard L. Van Enger, film editor (*Sands of Iwo Jima*, *Johnny Guitar*); Sam Leavitt, freelance cameraman who shot many of Otto Preminger's films (*Carmen Jones*, *Advise and Consent*); Paul Francis Webster, lyricist (*Calamity Jane*, *Lucky Me*, numerous title songs); Sam Jaffe, protean performer, ranging from *Gunga Din* to the fastidious mastermind in *The Asphalt*

Jungle; Jack Donohue, choreographer and occasional director (*Marriage on the Rocks*, *Assault on a Queen*); Mogens Skot-Hansen, Danish producer, founder of Laterna Film.

APRIL: William C. Thomas, independent producer in partnership with William H. Pine (*The Dividing Line*, *Run for Cover*); Samuel G. Engel, writer and/or producer, mostly for Fox (*My Darling Clementine*, *Night and the City*); Paul Ivano, cameraman on two celebrated films *maudits*, *A Woman of the Sea* and *Queen Kelly*, and on many Universal B pictures in the 1940s; Thorold Dickinson, English cinéaste; Byron Haskin, cameraman, special effects expert and director (*The War of the Worlds*, *The Naked Jungle*); John Lee Mahin, all-purpose scriptwriter, long resident at MGM (*Bombshell*, *Boom Town*); Leopold Lindtberg, Swiss director of internationalist themes (*The Last Chance*, *Four in a Jeep*); Richard Benedict, the trapped man in *Ace in the Hole*, from 1960 director of innumerable TV episodes; May McAvoy, leading lady of the 1920s who, despite co-starring in *The Jazz Singer*, virtually disappeared from the screen with the coming of sound.

MAY: Bob Clampett, supervisor in the 1940s of some classic Warner cartoons (*Horton Hatches the Egg*, *Coal Black and de Sebben Dwarfs*); Alan Schneider, director of the Beckett/Keaton Film, otherwise a man of the theatre; Diana Dors, voluptuous leading lady turned character actress and British institution; Robert Moore, director of Neil Simon comedies (*Murder by Death*, *Chapter Two*); Ben Roberts, scriptwriter (*White Heat*, *Serenade*); Irwin Shaw, novelist (*The Young Lions*, *Two Weeks in Another Town*); Terry O. Morse, editor, director of B pictures (*British Intelligence*, *Tear Gas Squad*); Peter Bull, specialising in apoplectic character parts (*Saraband for Dead Lovers*, *Tom Jones*); Andrea Leeds, actress with a brief period of stardom in the late 1930s (*Come and Get It!*, *The Real Glory*); John Marley, one of Cassavetes' Faces, the man who wakes up in bed with a dead horse in *The Godfather*; Dario Simoni, British-based set decorator (*The Third Man*, *Doctor Zhivago*); Eric Morecambe, master of the comedy of insult.

JUNE: Meredith Willson, Broadway composer/lyricist (*The Music Man*, *The Unsinkable Molly Brown*); Joseph Losey; William Keighley, contract director at Warners (half of *The Adventures of Robin Hood*, *The Man Who Came to Dinner*); Carl Foreman; Lillian Hellman.

JULY: Leonore J. Coffee, scriptwriter (*The Volga Boatmen*,



Robert Aldrich, Jennifer Kendal, James Mason.

Beyond the Forest); Dame Flora Robson, unpretentious actress, specialist in Queens (*Fire Over England*) and Empresses (*55 Days at Peking*); Ernest Tidyman, writer, creator of black super-tec Shaft; Gail Kubik, composer, working on many early UPA cartoons, occasional features (*The Desperate Hours*); Roger H. Lewis, independent producer (*The Pawnbroker*, *The Swimmer*); James Mason; Luis José Moglia Barth, Argentinian director (*El Ultimo Encuentro*, *Tango*).

AUGUST: Mary Miles Minter, Hollywood star of early 1920s, famous more for the ending of her career, via an entanglement with murdered director William Desmond Taylor, than for the career itself; Roland Kibbee, writer of several Burt Lancaster films, his co-director on *The Midnight Man*; Richard Burton; Walter Tevis, novelist (*The Hustler*, *The Man Who Fell to Earth*); J. B. Priestley, author whose original cinematic contributions included *Sing As We Go!* and some wartime propaganda shorts; Truman Capote, author (*In Cold Blood*), intermittently scriptwriter (*Beat the Devil*);

Emil Newman, composer (*The Thirteenth Letter*, *Rancho Notorious*).

SEPTEMBER: Arthur Schwartz, composer (*The Band Wagon*) and occasional producer (*Cover Girl*); Jennifer Kendal (Kapoor), actress of precision and delicacy (*36 Chowringhee Lane*, *The Home and the World*); Liam O'Flaherty, author of *The Informer*; Yilmaz Güney; Georges de Beauregard, prestigious producer of films by Godard, Rivette, Rohmer; Janet Gaynor, co-star, usually with Charles Farrell, in a succession of tender, depression-era love stories; Richard Basehart, actor (*14 Hours*, *La Strada*); Stan Vanderbeek, 'experimental' filmmaker, more humorously inclined than many of his colleagues (*Mankinda*, *Skulduggery*); Walter Pidgeon, avuncular, pipe-puffing figure, Mr Miniver in *Mrs Miniver*; Shelly Manne, jazz musician and composer, whose film scores included *Young Billy Young* and *Trial of the Catonsville Nine*.

OCTOBER: Albert J. Cohen, scriptwriter, producer at Universal in the 1950s (*Horizons West*, *Sign of the Pagan*); Leonard Rossiter, character actor of the big screen, superstar of the small one; H. Bruce Humberstone, middle-of-the-road director with one classic, *Hot Spot*, to his credit; Peggy Ann Garner, child star of *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*; Pierre Kast, a senior component of the Cahiers/Nouvelle Vague group of writer/directors (*Le Bel Age*, *Le Soleil en Face*); François Truffaut; Leonardo Cortese, leading man of wartime Italian cinema (*Un Garibaldino in Convento*, *Sissignora*), subsequently director of documentaries; Oskar Werner, gentle-mannered actor (*Lola Montez*, *Jules et Jim*); Pascale Ogier, accomplished young star of *Les Nuits de la Pleine Lune*; Alfred W. Crown, wheeler-dealer and independent producer (*Last Summer*, *Taking Off*); June Duprez, actress both in England (Korda's *The Four Feathers*) and Hollywood (*None But the Lonely Heart*); Eduardo de Filippo, relentlessly Neapolitan artist, who directed screen versions of several of his plays (*Filumena Marturano*) and contributed to many other films as an actor (*Oro di Napoli*); Denise Vernac, actress (*Ils Etaient Neuf Célibataires*, *Montparnasse 19*) also writer and for many years collaborator/companion of Erich von Stroheim; Julian Jebb, producer of TV documentaries, writer on the arts.

NOVEMBER: Norman Krasna, writer/producer/director, notably the former (*The Devil and Miss Jones*, *Princess O'Rourke*); Ivor Montagu, many-sided film-maker, writer and Soviet apologist.

Compiled by BOB BAKER



BRITISH FILM YEAR

John Howkins

Nothing revealed the desperate need for British Film Year better than did the official announcement on 18 October. Not because the announcement, made at the Waldorf Hotel, London, was a success. But because it showed how much the film industry needs to wake up to the reality of the film business. As David Puttnam said at the Waldorf, BFY is about business, not art. Yet many film people whose business depends on good publicity seemed curiously muted about promoting their own industry's ideas and plans. Many of the questioners seemed to doubt that a joint industry promotion is possible, or even desirable.

Several questions were asked about the purpose of BFY. Is it to support films? Or to support cinemas? Is it to provide a showcase for British film-making? Or to encourage more people to go to the cinema more often—regardless of what is on? At one time, film and cinema went together like—well, like Laurel and Hardy. No longer. Film financing has been hard hit. Film production, similarly. The government's White Paper on Film Policy is the culmination of a series of blows. At the other end of the distribution chain, film exhibition is fragmented and hapless. People love movies; people do not like going to the cinema; so nine out of ten films are seen on tv or video.

In the first four months of 1984, according to the Department of Trade and Industry, cinema admissions fell from the 1983 figure of 23,430,000 to a measly total of 16,300,000. That's a drop of 32 per cent, causing a fall in box-office receipts (mitigated by slightly higher prices) of 25 per cent. On these figures, the 1984 total of admissions could be around 50 million, compared to 1983's 63 million. And that, shamefully, is less than the number of viewings of films on tv in an average week.

Most film companies (producers, distributors, exhibitors) tend to think about the cinema merely as an outlet for their latest product. They do not want to engage with the public who may, if the circumstances are right, go to the cinema and form an audience. They are locked into thinking about their own supply of films; they have forgotten about the

public's demand for entertainment. The results of this ancient approach to the business of films are too apparent. Going to the cinema should be fun; too often, it ain't.

At the Swiss Cottage Odeon recently, the front-of-house staff didn't know the name of the director of the film they were showing. At the Electric Screen, one of London's acclaimed independents, *Spinal Tap* fell flat because the sound quality was so bad that we missed most of the jokes (one person walked out). I know the film has jokes only because my companion, who had already seen it elsewhere, kept on laughing. I was told by the staff that the sound quality that evening was no worse than usual. A week later, I phoned continually to the Odeon Haymarket for forty-eight hours because the ads said all seats were bookable and I didn't want a wasted journey. The phone was either engaged or not answered. We took a chance and turned up; all seats sold. My next two visits were pure pleasure; I went to private preview cinemas. The films seemed good, too.

So what does BFY hope to do? The first priority is to improve cinemas, all over the country. Thorn EMI (ABC), Rank (Odeon) and Cannon (Classic) have promised to spend about £12 million on making their cinemas more comfortable and improving technical standards. This, it is hoped, will have several spin-off effects. It will affirm the value of film-in-cinema as good entertainment and thus create new and more regular audiences for film. It will move film-in-cinema to the high ground of entertainment and culture. And, by increasing box-office revenues, it should increase investors' confidence and therefore the amount of money available for new production. The BFY's original target was between 4 per cent and 7 per cent increases in cinema admissions. These percentages are much too modest. They need to be trebled if cinemas are to survive both as a business and as local centres of entertainment.

The flagship of the national campaign is the BFY Roadshow, which will visit about thirty towns to promote film and cinema. It will become a centre for local events and shows. Other initiatives are

equally imaginative, if less public. One of the most interesting is the educational programme, which aims to alert school children to film as a source of stories and a means of expression. BFY want to bring film into schools and put the moving image alongside print. It's an innovative, stimulating project, which the DES should have supported years ago. It didn't, largely because the film industry (and the tv industry) didn't propose it.

This project's spirited approach to film will not judge its results solely by the number of children who go to the cinema. That is one criterion, but there are others. The organisers want to inculcate a new approach to moving images among both teachers and children. The coordinator, Dick Ross, is well qualified; after being editor of the day for the BBC's Nine O'Clock News for four years, he is now head of film and tv at the Royal College of Art. Although they will work with schools, 'enlightenment' seems a better word than 'teaching'.

The plans for overseas events are remarkable for a different reason. Some forty British Film Weeks will be held, centred on a British Pavilion which will show some of the more successful British movies (under the bizarre title of 'The Revival Years', which seems odd for such current releases as *The Hit* and *Company of Wolves*). The purpose of these events is to use British films as the main attraction to promote a wide range of British products. The nominal budget is £3 million, which is twice as much as the national budget. There has been some criticism that the money would be better spent at home. So it would, but BFY doesn't have the choice. Whereas the national events are being primarily funded by the film industry, the overseas events are being substantially funded by non-film companies.

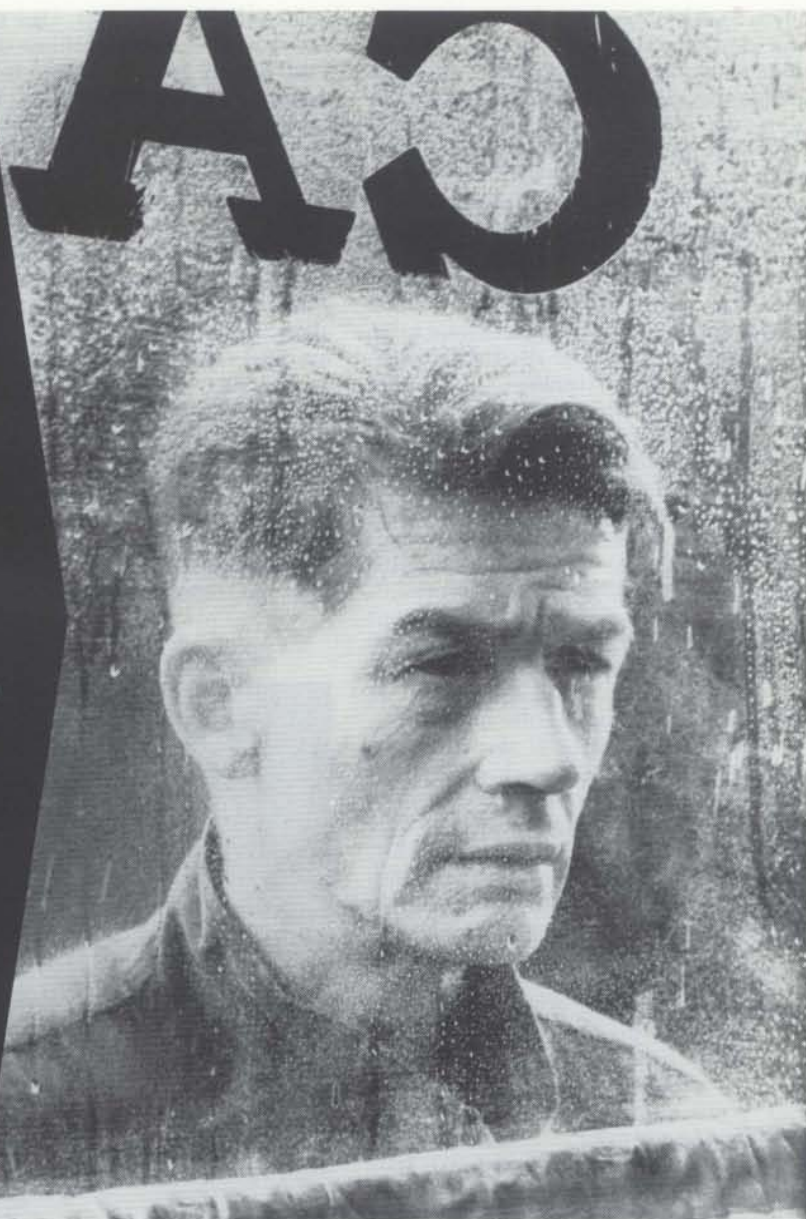
This bias has interesting implications. It recognises that British films not only have a distinctive British quality but that they can rank with the best. For many years, a few people have claimed that British talents in writing, theatre, tv and film constitute one of the country's greatest natural resources (the latest proponent of that view is Sir Denis Forman, sometime Director of the BFI and now chief tv statesman, in his 1984 MacTaggart Lecture). The BFY's international events mark the beginning of the recognition of this fact.

By the time BFY is officially launched in March, the number and variety of events should have grown to encompass most facets of the film industry. Already, the catalogue of ideas and plans is impressive and deserves support. Every other industry or trade, from housing to computers to novels, has its own joint industry promotion body. BFY is to be welcomed on these grounds alone. Better late than never. The 11 year held in 1982 (itself one of the original seeds of BFY 85) did manage, after initial doubts, to create a more positive image for computers. The Book Marketing Council, and the Booker Prize, do sell more books. Now it is the turn of film and the moving image to get its act together. ■

Forward into British Film Year

A Series of
Sideways and
Backwards
Reflections

MARK LE FANU



1984: John Hurt as Winston Smith.

Various types of film-making—as various types of film-maker—nestle together in the United Kingdom and Ireland. There exists a vigorous if frenetic commercial film culture which this article does not propose to consider. Britain is a base or a domicile for a number of film-makers of standing: Stanley Kubrick, John Boorman, David Lean, Richard Attenborough, Nicolas Roeg, Alan Parker, Ridley Scott—the list could be extended. It is also of course the base, in Pinewood, Elstree and other studios, of a fabulously successful series of science-fiction, spy and fantasy films, usually, but not invariably, made by American producers and directors. They include splendid and mythical entertainments; but I repeat I don't want to talk about them. I want to discuss the smaller-scale, indigenous serious film-maker and his problems—this film-maker who looks around him to see what is filmable in Britain, and upon whose findings the rest of the world, just at this moment, is kind enough to wait with a sort of bated breath, and a willingness to be disarmingly impressed.

Who would want to be a film-maker—British or otherwise? It is a glamorous

occupation, of course, in one way: one of the most glamorous going. But the reality is different from the fantasy. Almost no occupation could be harsher or more thankless. The film-maker is lumbered not simply with the artistic decisions governing the practice of his craft (we assume he must want these) but also, increasingly, with the financial and managerial ones. In the absence of formal institutional structures governing studio, production, distribution and guarantees, a director's each new project has to begin right from the beginning. Finding the producer, cajoling the backers, organising the working timetables, and all the time keeping in reserve one's energy for the artistic battle to come: what sort of person can be expected to encompass these responsibilities successfully? The modern film-maker has been compared to a general. If Wellington's, or Napoleon's, courage was tested by a nearness to death on the field of battle, at least they had the prestige of the state behind them, harnessed to a noble collective enterprise. The film-maker has only his dreams to sustain him. The wonder is, in the circumstances, that the

courage and ambition required for large-scale film-making manifest themselves as often as they do.

A film festival attended earlier this year (one of the smaller European ones) provided the occasion to flesh out some of these intuitions in more detail. I was struck first of all by the youthfulness of the participating directors. They were nearly all in their mid-twenties and early thirties. It was as if the initiative required to bring to fruition a project as complicated and stressful as the modern independent film could only be undertaken at a particular stage in one's life. The directors I met appeared to be engaged in a gamble whose terms were as follows. Cinema, of course, many people agree, is an infinitely richer and freer and more personal medium than television. It provides, what working in television doesn't, the opportunity to carve out one's own creative development. Also, at the same time (an honourable ambition), to get one's name 'known' internationally. Granted that its livelihood is fantastically more precarious than the equivalent livelihood in television (which, being a public institution,

offers continuous salaried employment and pension), the rewards and satisfactions available to the successful aspirant enable the gamble to be contemplated. If it is not successful, there is always television to fall back on. Meanwhile, one's late twenties and early thirties are a period of life relatively unencumbered by family responsibilities. The world can be travelled, and experiments made, the failure of which will not be irreversible.

If this sounds like a cynical view, it allows me to pinpoint what seems to be most fragile about the 'British Renaissance' (and, by extension, about the renaissance in other European countries). It is this: that the isolated and piecemeal method of making independent films that has become universal practice fails to provide the security that would allow a film-maker to think of his craft as a career. And yet without this security and openness to continuous development, one can't really talk about film-making being a proper craft at all. It is something else—I am not certain what: an ego trip, an experiment, an adventure; maybe a mixture of all three. The great film-makers of the past—the Lubitsches, Fords, Mizoguchis, Hawkses—required up to ten or twelve films to find their distinctive, famous voices. The modern British film-maker, by contrast, looks as if he will be lucky to make half as many films in his lifetime. One begins to see an ambiguity in the spectacle of youthful directors at festivals. Their presence, though encouraging, is promissory, or proleptic. What is missing is the weight, or presence, of film-makers who *have* served their apprenticeship, and whose films (in their ease, maturity and craftsmanship) demonstrate this soundly to audiences.

These observations, if they are true and not merely tendentious, may be followed up in a number of ways. One thing Britain lacks, for instance, is a tradition of senior working film-makers to act as an inspiration to younger men and women setting out on their careers. Recently the films of the 81-year-old Russian Yuli Raizman were shown at the National Film Theatre, including a couple made in the last year or so. One could see at once they were the work of a master; and that the mastery consisted of the distillation of a lifetime's experience. Raizman, then, is still making films; and, what is more, heading a film unit (at Mosfilm) responsible for up to eight features a year. The condensed humanist presence of so much historical experience functions in a way that it is not easy to find an equivalent for in the setting of contemporary British film-making. Yet its lack may be a serious disadvantage.

Similar reflections are appropriate in considering British films in relation to the work of other great established European film directors, such as Bresson, Wajda, Rosi, Fellini or Bergman. The vigour of their unabating enterprise gives the lie to my previous observation, that it is only young men who have the 'energy' to make films successfully. On the contrary, the energy of middle-aged and elderly film-makers is a constant

and chastening wonder. One thinks, for example, of the sheer volume of decisions that Fellini had to make, in terms of casting, costume, set-design, locale and music, for a recent film like *And The Ship Sails On* (a film, admittedly, that not everyone liked). Spectacle seems to become *more* extravagant and audacious rather than less as Fellini's career deepens and mellows. But the United Kingdom at present lacks completely the stable industrial structure that would allow a young film-maker, at the start of his career, ever to envisage completing it on the sort of terms Fellini has forged for himself.

Honesty compels me to admit, too, that my earlier contrast between independent film-makers and 'indentured' television directors is not as straightforward as it looks. The young film-maker thinks proudly that he is escaping from the constrictions of television; but

Derek Jarman's new short film *Imagining October*. Photo: Stuart Dollin.



Image-making: Julien Temple's *The Great Rock 'n' Roll Swindle*.

the constrictions may in fact be illusory. British television is multifaceted and various. The limitations of its drama output are limitations upon formal experiment, not upon knowledge or sophistication. Within its traditional structures there flourishes a rich, quasi-anonymous creativity. Television, at its best, shows a wonderful quiet knowledge about the intricacies of human motivation. This is particularly so in its serial dramas of seven or eight original episodes. The sheer length of their unfolding has within it the opportunity of containing a close-up meditation on character, and an attention to development and nuance, that cinema can only stand aside from and envy. If, ultimately, cinema's justification as a separate entity can be established by its own autonomous criteria, there is nothing about the older medium any longer that is automatically superior to the younger.

The existence of television as a pervasive fact in our culture sharpens then, as nothing else does, the need to re-investigate cinema's specificity. It forces us to ask more clearly: what is it we *want* from our film-makers? Boldly or foolishly—or both—let me attempt a few answers. Cinema's power and importance, it seems to me, lie in a combination of two distinct qualities. On the one hand there is its visual capacity, making it the true heir to painting. Film is the last of the 'fine arts'. The epic sweep of the filmic canvas takes over from where the nineteenth century stopped. The practitioners of world cinema number among the very greatest painters of the century (perhaps indeed they *are* the very greatest painters of the century).

But pictorialism is not enough by itself. Cinema comes into its own when this first vital quality is combined with a second one, which I would define as a magic matchless naturalism, a sort of

sustained seriousness about human behaviour (and a delicacy in demonstrating it) that is greater and more intimate than in any other drama we know.

British cinema possesses both these qualities separately, in abundance. The trouble is exactly that they *are* separate. We have, as it were, both the severest, most intimist cinema in the world; and also the most relentlessly 'aestheticist'. Neither of the qualities fertilises the other properly. In this failure of cross-fertilisation, as I believe it, lies one reason why we possess, at present, no truly permanent outstanding figure in world cinema. The generalisation is a sweeping one, as generalisations go, and capable of qualification. Perhaps one ought to look a little more closely.

'Aestheticism' occurs, I think, when a concern for style pushes itself to the fore at the expense of proper human content. The distinction between 'form' and 'content' is a conceptually tricky one, but

and not designed to act as a bludgeon. I repeat: the valuing of form over content is something that, as a group, young artists are professionally prone to. The problem is surely this: that in the absence from the British scene of senior established film-making, criticism in reviews and journals finds itself tempted the whole time towards valuing over-seriously (and extensively over-exegising) films which in other circumstances would probably be seen to be merely apprentice efforts.

One needn't, then, spend too much time on a young artist like Julien Temple (though in some ways he's typical of what I'm driving at). His talent, it strikes me, is still strictly to be proven. 'Style' belongs as yet, in his films, to the aggressive banalities of pop culture. He is a slick, skilled producer of images, and precisely, an image-maker rather than a film-maker.

Moving in closer to painting, we find Derek Jarman. In a certain perspective

Fellini, above) to the culmination of a lifetime's career in cinema, when every aspect of the craft has been mastered.

Christopher Petit is an aesthete, and one of the more important ones. He came into film-making direct from university and journalism. Three films have been issued so far (a fourth is being completed). None of them is entirely satisfactory. His importance for my purposes is theoretical: it lies in the single-mindedness with which he pursues the view that film is a visual rather than a theatrical medium. But the truism, of course, is capable of being developed in either direction. It can mean on the one hand (what we may all agree about) that the human form in landscape when filmed with sensitivity, and with an attention to silence as well as to language, is an infinitely beautiful medium, capable of communicating truths (and emotions) that the theatre can never have dreamt of. Certainly, something of these thoughts seems to lie behind Petit's allegiance to the visual mastery, and the slowness, of European cinema (the cinema, particularly, of Wenders). But in Petit's case the painterly flair seems to fail to be backed up, beyond a residual melancholy, by any profound content or passion. Lacking a real concern for the interpretation of experience (as opposed to its behaviourist imitation), his films remain, so far, willed and academic...

Formalism, of sorts, is in general the besetting sin of our independent avant-garde film-makers, a number of whom, like Petit (or like Peter Wollen), first came into the picture as critics. I do not know whether Sally Potter started out as a writer or critic, but her film *The Gold Diggers* (a first feature, and the subject last year of an elaborate celebration at the National Film Theatre) struck me as a further interesting example of this aestheticism I have been trying to isolate. The film was a meditation on money (on what Marxists call the circulation of exchange), on the one hand; and on the other hand, on the passivity of the woman's image in advertising and cinema, confirmed, as it were, by the 'patriarchal' oppression of capital. Since it was a film of the Left, there were circumstances, it was hinted, in which the passivity could be broken out from and revolutionised. The film showed some of these in elliptical sequences. Now the ideas behind the film were as interesting as pure ideas ever are; but they did not seem to be attached to anything existentially urgent in the experience of the person expressing them (the film-maker herself, Sally Potter). One looked in vain for the kind of sensual delicacy or discretion by which ideas find their right level in the work of French film-makers like Marker. In Chris Marker, or Pierre Rissient, ideas are part of a larger encompassing approach to life: they are what one might call an ingredient in the art of life. To be successful in cinema, surely, ideas need to avoid solemnity. They must be not so much statements of fact, as fragmentary passions, or hypotheses...

Perhaps I have said enough about aestheticism to make my point. The



Sally Potter's *The Gold Diggers*: Colette Laffont, Julie Christie.

most people know what is meant. At its highest reaches, which is to say in the hands of the great traditional film-makers, the one quality moves imperceptibly into the other. Films like *The Devil Is a Woman* (Josef von Sternberg, 1935) and *Lady from Shanghai* (Orson Welles, 1949), on one level fantastic aesthetic exercises, surprise us continuously by their emotional plangency and affectiveness. The same is true, as has often been remarked, about the 'baroque' form of melodrama in the hands of such masters as Sirk. Lower down the artistic scale, however, the concern about technique at the expense of anything truly interesting to say about life can only be unsatisfactory and irritating.

Several examples of this fault are about to be given from contemporary British cinema; but if I submit to the necessity of citing names (I don't see how it can be avoided), it ought to be borne in mind that my strictures are tentative,

he ought to be one of our more notable aesthetes (on a par with an artist like Peter Greenaway). His inability to find backing for a proposed film on Caravaggio raises, however, a number of questions that are germane to the drift of the argument. First, of course, there is the 'martyrdom' of the independent film-maker, mentioned (sympathetically) at the beginning of this article. In Britain at the moment the conditions are such that years of a man's life can be wasted in futile preparation for projects that never materialise. Plainly this is stupid and regrettable. Yet when one has got through lamenting such a state of affairs, there is surely left over the more subversive question as to what ought to be on film, or on television. Programmes like *Arena* and *Omnibus* make, after all, with anonymous discretion and courtesy, a dozen documentaries a year about painting. Perhaps a film like *Caravaggio* belongs either to television or (as in

young British cinema has plenty of this, but so do other world cinemas. What British cinema is really known for, as far as it is known at all, is the opposite quality: a dour and gritty realism, small in scale, suitable for transference to television (or *vice versa*, from television to the larger screen); provincial at any event, working-class, 'powerful'. The tradition encompasses such different film-makers as Ken Loach, Tony Garnett, Bill Douglas, Terence Davies and Mike Leigh.

Among these there are film-makers—Ken Loach would be one, Mike Leigh another—who have long since made their peace with television. Perhaps they were, or perhaps they were not, interested (one shan't know without asking them) in having their names as well known abroad as Wajda's and Bergman's are reciprocally well known in this country. (One gets the impression that there are other, more urgent things on their minds.) None the less, since the subject of this article is cinema, the contrast persists uninvited. What sort of criteria should be used in linking, or not linking, this present domestic small-scale cinema to the best contemporary film-making in the world?

The question has no short neat answer. If we take the film trilogies of Bill Douglas (*My Childhood*, *My Ain Folk*, *My Way Home*) and Terence Davies (*Children*, *Madonna and Child*, *Death and Transfiguration*), as examples, we find that they are undoubtedly 'real' works of cinema, as lucid and ascetic and impressive as (say) some of the late works of Bresson. One has, then, in two instances, both product and film-makers that can theoretically be compared with the best. But Davies at the moment seems as eager to become a novelist as to continue film-maker; while Douglas, after his initial acclaim, has not made a film in ten years (though he should soon be starting his long-awaited film on the Tolpuddle Martyrs). It would be impertinent of the critic to offer 'explanations' for events he has no means of verifying. Yet none the less, on the wider issue of productivity, one or two thoughts may be hazarded.

The first has to do with ambition. The rigours of film-making are such that its practice will always surely be among the hardest of artistic endeavours. But as this is true for one, so it is true for every film-maker, in every film-making nation. The issue, perhaps, is never finally whether enough money or backing is available, so much as whether the director in question has the will to succeed. The Tarkovskys, or Satyajit Rays, or Lino Brockas, who revivify a nation's film culture singlehandedly, must exist, in the last resort, outside the scope of prediction. I am anti-determinist on this matter, and believe straightforwardly that goals can be achieved if they are wanted enough.

The difficulty with film-makers like Davies and Douglas is that they are subject to puritanical tendencies, the reverse side of their passionate integrity.



Terence Davies' *Madonna and Child*: Terry O'Sullivan.

Their art—and the art of men like them such as Loach and Garnett—is important and impressive because it is grounded in personal experience and speaks, as it were, from the heart. Yet perhaps there are limits to how much anyone's personal autobiography, and the diffused anger which fuels it, can continue to be a sufficient subject for cinema. The great film-makers of former times (as opposed to the contemporary miniaturists of television) were frescoists and painters of murals. Like the best nineteenth century novelists, they were unerringly intelligent about 'type'. Such powers of observation (one sees it in Hitchcock and Buñuel) require more geniality and

worldliness than our ascetic film-makers are inclined, at the moment, to make allowance for. The limitation is in the end, perhaps, the peculiarly British one of feeling that the only authentic interpretation of life lies in the experience of adversity, and class struggle. Surely, however, for all its popularity in the mediums of cultural exchange (from *Time Out* to the BBC's *Kaleidoscope*), the view is a false and old-fashioned one. It may seem to readers one of the least significant of disadvantages, when British cinema has so many others, but to me it is regrettable that there doesn't exist in Britain a film-maker like Krzysztof Zanussi (or it might be Yuli Raizman

Christopher Petit's *Flight to Berlin*: Tusse Silberg.





Bill Douglas' *My Ain Folk*: Stephen Archibald.

since I have mentioned him) who is able to put into adult and critical perspective the direct experience of living under socialism.

Zanussi and Raizman both have many films behind them. The weight of their established careers reminds one anew what a fragile and tentative phenomenon one is considering in talking about a 'British Renaissance'. Terence Davies

and Bill Douglas have essentially only one film apiece to their credit. Neil Jordan has two, as has Michael Radford. Christopher Petit has made three films, a tally shared by Stephen Frears and by the fast-working ex-theatre director Richard Eyre. Bill Forsyth has made four. Moving in on the scene, meanwhile, are literary practitioners such as David Hare, Stephen Poliakoff and Ian

McEwan, with television plays that are poised (not too convincingly, some might think) to turn into cinema. What does it all amount to? The best British film of 1984 was *1984*, and Radford is a genuine film-maker. He possesses, straightforwardly, what I have been arguing for throughout this essay, an innate sense of balance between the claims of thought and the claims of painterly spectacle. Much hope therefore resides in him.

Of the remaining figures on my list, the two most substantial—Bill Forsyth and Richard Eyre—are both directors of comedy. If none of Richard Eyre's three films (*The Ploughman's Lunch*, *Loose Connections* and *Laughter House*) is an out and out 'masterpiece', each has an elliptical subtlety that has not, perhaps, been given its due. Forsyth's films are charming and sophisticated, their means of expression, like Radford's, effortlessly lucid and cinematic. There is no reason why comedy should not continue to be as formally and plastically adventurous as any other form of cinema (one thinks of cinema's origins; more recently of film-makers like Tati and Allen). Yet limitations—of repetition, and theme—are met with earlier in comedy than in more traditional serious cinema. Its 'real' classics are correspondingly fewer. There is, is there not, an awful lot of weight on Forsyth's shoulders? Perhaps, it is the least we can hope for, 1985 will bring to light new directors of stature to step forward and help ease the burden. ■



NEW

£2^{off}

A Great New Reference Book!

British Sound Films

The Studio Years 1928-1959

David Quinlan

£20.00  **Batsford Books**

AT YOUR NEAREST BOOKSHOP Voucher valid until 31st March 1985



Note to Bookseller: Batsford will give full credit on any voucher presented before 30th June 1985. Cash refund available to non-account holders. One voucher per copy, not valid against any other book.

Puttnam, Joffé and Robinson on Cambodia — James Park

In a recent book, *The Quality of Mercy*, William Shawcross quotes an Oxfam official on the appeal of recent Cambodian history for the western conscience: 'It had everything—temples, starving brown babies and an Asian Hitler figure—it was like sex on a tiger skin.' The starting point for producer David Puttnam's film *The Killing Fields* was significantly more low-key: a picture in *Time* magazine of a passionate embrace that entwined *New York Times* journalist Sydney Schanberg and Cambodian Dith Pran at a refugee camp on the Thai border, the positive ending to four harrowing years of separation. Filmed three years later by director Roland Joffé and cameraman Chris Menges, the neat resolution offered by that image was to be deflected to pictures of stunned refugees and a textual note to the effect that the country's agony continues. John Lennon's 'Imagine' plays on the soundtrack: loosely ironic, naggingly inappropriate and somewhat vulgar. 'The images,' says Joffé, 'are the summation of what the film is about—broken families and broken individuals.'

Open endings have characterised Puttnam's work since *Chariots of Fire*: the ringing telephone in *Local Hero*, the arrest of Cal outside a country house in Northern Ireland. The conclusion of *The Killing Fields* neatly directs attention



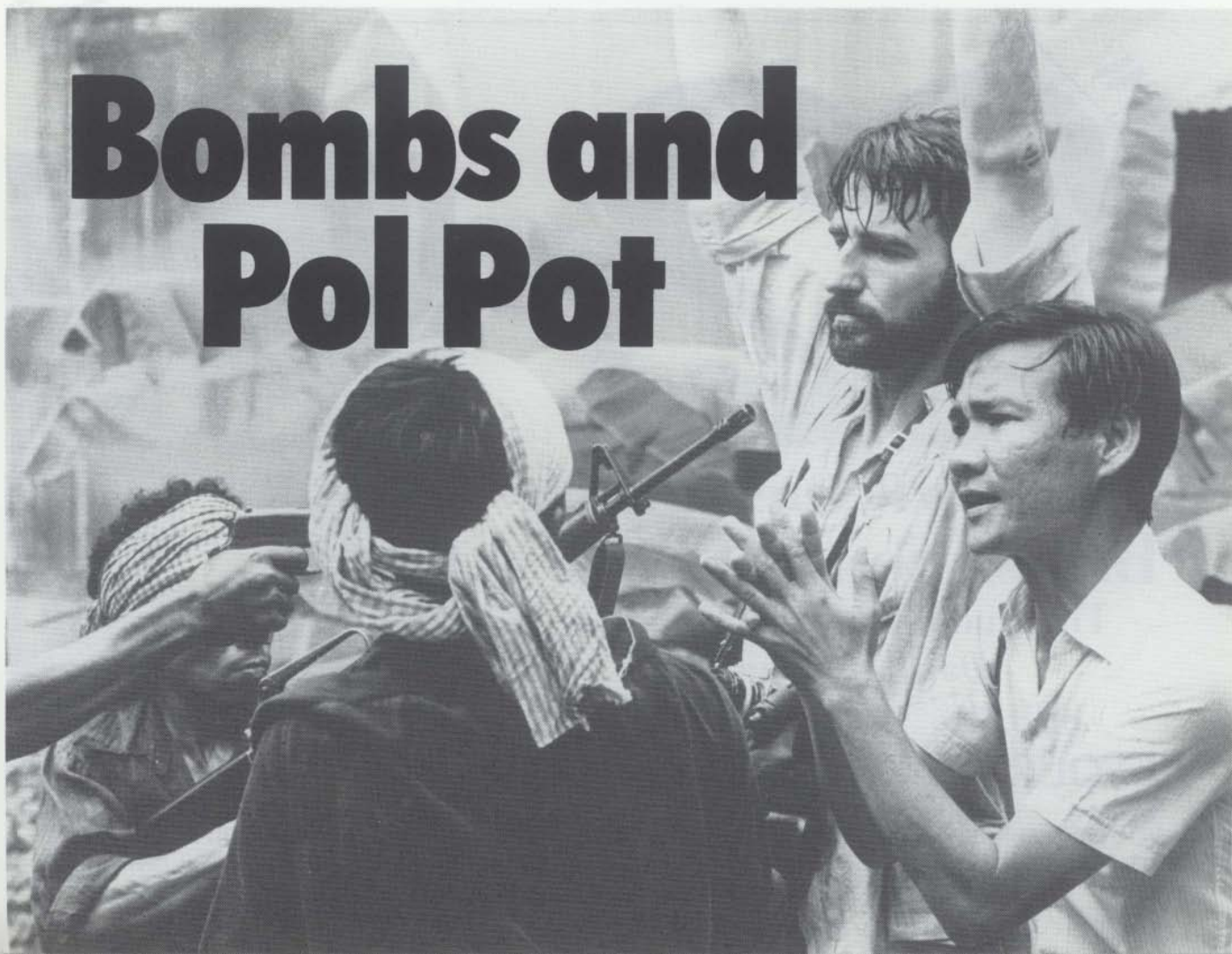
Left to right: David Puttnam, Roland Joffé, Bruce Robinson.

back from the story's happy resolution to the film's tragic content. The encouragement which such a gesture offers to anger, ambivalence and guilt sharply distinguishes the film's effect from that of other recent pictures which have dealt with the predicament of journalists caught up in Third World revolutions. The Australian radio reporter of *The Year of Living Dangerously* escapes with his new beloved on the last plane out of Jakarta. 'Life,' says the film Schanberg

(Sam Waterston), 'is not a 40s movie, one cannot just get on a plane and make the whole world turn out right.' In *Under Fire*, the American photo-journalist seemingly stumbles on a solution to the civil war in Nicaragua and stays to celebrate the departure of Somoza. When Schanberg, by contrast, attempts to use his filmless Nikon to stop the summary execution of some Khmer Rouge guerrillas, he is arrested and they are shot.

The basic discourses of *The Killing*

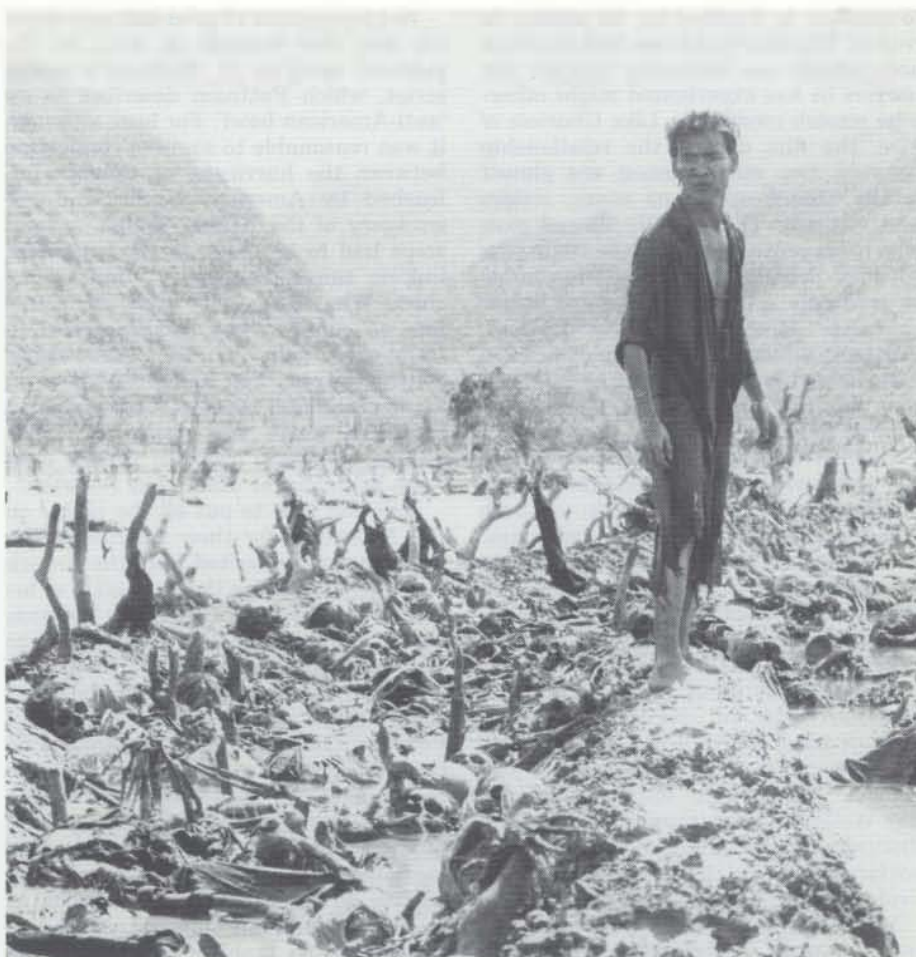
Bombs and Pol Pot



Fields concern people and politics rather than journalism. Reporters are shown, in fact, to be wholly impotent. Power failures and transmitter breakdowns dog their efforts to get news out to the world, and what comes back on the radio is often whitewash and misinterpretation. In the second half of the film, Pran, Schanberg's interpreter and a fellow journalist, watches passively as those who have not learnt the rule that only the silent survive are led off to execution. Meanwhile, back in the United States, Schanberg is stuck with his guilt and frustration at not being able to do anything for his friend. The powerlessness mirrors, on the larger plane, the inability of the American regime to achieve its policy objectives in South East Asia, and the despair of French embassy officials unable to do anything for the Cambodians who have sought refuge behind their walls. 'Adieu, ancien régime,' one of them remarks with a shrug as a former government member is expelled for inevitable liquidation.

The Killing Fields is even more sharply distinguished from films about Vietnam made by American directors. It does not share the exclusively American orientation of such films as *The Deer Hunter* or *Apocalypse Now*, nor does it ever lose the human message in orgies of hardware or distracting allegory. The opening images of *The Killing Fields* hint at this style of film-making: a tranquil landscape is disrupted by helicopters and then napalm. But Schanberg promptly intervenes in voice-over to speak of his relationship with Pran, the constant centre of the film thereafter. 'Although it is a film about war,' Joffé said before shooting began, 'containing a lot of complex issues, it is actually about people. I would hate it if the tanks took over from the eyes or the machine guns from people's hands and feet.'

The effect of Joffé's policy decision can be clearly seen in the film's account of its first major incident, the occasion when an American bomber accidentally unloaded over the friendly town of Neak Luong. Schanberg's original account of the resulting devastation suggested the full resources of Gothic imagery: 'Trees for acres around are stripped of leaves and charred, with sheets of tin from soldiers' huts swaying from some of the high branches. A woman's scalp hangs on a clump of tall grass. A bloody pillow here, a shred of a sarong caught on a barbed wire there, a large bloodstain on the brown earth.' Those images are absent from the film. Instead, an initial tracking shot concentrates on a wounded child and grief-afflicted people. 'The idea was not to go in for masses of shocking imagery,' Joffé says. 'I wanted it to be a film of consequences. Any time there was a killing, it was specifically used as part of the film's emotional charge.' Later, when a military outpost falls to the Khmer Rouge, the camera focuses twice on a screaming girl. This human scale is evident even in more lurid scenes, as when hospital cleaners sweep up the blood around rotting corpses or Pran ambles through damp fields lined



Dith Pran (Dr Haing S. Ngor) amid the skeletons.

with skeletons as he escapes from village death squads.

Joffé not only denies the audience the let out that objective images of bomb devastation would provide, he also refuses to provide a demonology that could salve the liberal conscience. The American embassy officials are sensitive, if somewhat blind, people trying to do their jobs within the limitations laid down from above. The Khmer Rouge murderers in Pran's community are misguided children. Even the prospective executioners of Schanberg, Pran and their fellow journalists are depicted as innocents, picking over the appurtenances of the reporting trade like savages at their first meeting with western civilisation. And cadre member Phat speaks to Pran with concern, shortly before his own execution, of the extent to which the revolution has lost faith in its people. 'We cared little,' said the real Schanberg, 'about local or international politics or about military strategy. What propelled both of us was the human impact.' Whereas in *Under Fire* and *The Year of Living Dangerously* the political leaders Somoza and Suharto enter the story, the superpowers responsible for the human tragedy of *The Killing Fields* are only indicated in glancing asides—a radio broadcast about Sihanouk in Peking, a smashed picture of Brezhnev, the lowering of the Stars and Stripes, a video of Nixon's attempt to justify dropping several billion dollars worth of bombs on Cambodia.

Like *Under Fire* and *The Year of Living Dangerously*, *The Killing Fields*

was made by a non-American director with finance raised largely outside Hollywood (it would not, however, have been made without the commitment of a British company, Goldcrest Films). *The Killing Fields* is unique in the way it combines a foreground story of two individuals with the wider political landscape, but it shares the problems inherent in making an American film on the evils of the American way of international politics. The concessions that had to be made to sensitivities at Warner Brothers could have disembowelled the film of meaning. Instead, by treating the pressures to take the film away from its agitprop beginnings as problems requiring solution, its makers have deepened the political and historical analysis. The studio pressure to produce a picture that would be acceptable to American audiences functioned as only one element in a dialectical process that also involved documented reality and the different perspectives offered by screenwriter, producer and director. The result is a film that diverts the audience from any facile analysis and only proposes conclusions without limiting interpretation. 'The film was not there,' Joffé says, 'to hector people, neither was it meant to wrap everything up in a neat package of anger and discontent. What I wanted to do was to bring people close to the emotional colour of the events, from which they are free to draw off ideas.'

On one level *The Killing Fields* is an archetypal Puttnam film. Like *Chariots of Fire* and *Midnight Express*, its licence

to passion is fortified by its source in reality. The fact that Pran both survives and retains his humanity despite the horrors he has experienced might otherwise stretch credibility. Like *Chariots of Fire*, the film depicts the relationship between two men (women are almost totally absent except as wives, sisters and victims). The morally flawed man who holds centre screen at the beginning (Sydney Schanberg, Harold Abrahams) is gradually eclipsed by a more heroic character (Dith Pran, Eric Liddell). Puttnam admits to some identification with Schanberg, as earlier he remarked that he felt close to Abrahams but aspired to be Liddell.

Colin Welland and Bruce Robinson, the screenwriters respectively of *Chariots of Fire* and *The Killing Fields*, are both voluble men with socialist learnings. The logic of those commissions lay in Puttnam's search for a passionate and committed screenplay. 'If you start with a cool and analytical script,' he says, 'it is extremely difficult to get any director in the world to inject passion into it. If you start with an over-the-top screenplay, a blue pencil and some sensible thought can retain what is best and remove what is bad.' Robinson's script, like Welland's, was initially too long and discursive, but it provided the structure within which Puttnam and Joffé could evolve a more sophisticated approach.

Initial trimming removed historical incidents that deflected attention from the core relationship between Pran and Schanberg. A more serious surgical job had to be done on the script's negative characterisation of Schanberg. Robinson's dislike of the American journalist was partly personal (he felt that Schanberg had in fact treated Pran badly) and partly political. Schanberg was too soft, in Robinson's view, on the American government's responsibility for what happened in Cambodia. Joffé and Puttnam were more interested in exploring what they saw as Schanberg's fatal flaw—personal ambition in the pursuit of which he was prepared to sacrifice Pran. 'The idea was for people to feel ambivalent about him and, in the process, about themselves,' Joffé says. 'We did not attempt to make him sympathetic or palatable, only rounded. I wanted to get his dilemma right rather than to criticise him.'

The film-makers' sensitivity to the relevance for their own lives of the dilemmas facing an ambitious international journalist fortified their resolve in the battle that ensued with Warner Brothers over the casting of Schanberg. The studio was adamant that the part should go to a name star with the status of Al Pacino, Dustin Hoffman or Roy Scheider. Puttnam, fighting the battle against 'the rules as laid down in America' which he seems to re-engage with each new film, insisted on an actor who could capture the subtleties of Schanberg's character and would allow the limelight to move from himself to a non-professional Cambodian actor. They finally secured approval for Sam Waterston, but not before threatening to remove the film from Warners.

The perspective of producer and director was also brought to bear on the political analysis of Robinson's initial script, which Puttnam describes as an 'anti-American howl'. For him, although it was reasonable to argue a connection between the hurricane of violence unleashed by American bombs and the savagery of the Khmer Rouge, several steps had to be made in the argument linking cause (bombs) to effect (genocide). 'What Bruce had done was somehow to equate what had happened in Cambodia only to the Americans,' Puttnam says. 'You have to go back in history and find that the Cambodians a thousand years ago were the most vicious, nihilistic race in South East Asia. Somehow or other they reverted.'

Joffé felt that to put all the blame on the Americans for their treatment of a problem they inherited from the French was facile. Bringing the conviction of his youth that the American war in Vietnam was totally without justification, he was also conscious that Marxist theory, to which he feels partially sympathetic, could not be totally separated from Pol Pot's political philosophy as applied in Cambodia. 'If we are part of progressive movements,' he says, 'we have to face the fact that these are things we may unleash ourselves. I don't think that means we have to abandon revolution, but we do have to take a hard look at revolution and some of its consequences.'

There is no problem in reading *The Killing Fields* as a condemnation of American policy in Cambodia. The filming of the airport evacuation scene, with the American ambassador's car crossing the tarmac oblivious to the surrounding panic, is a symbolic representation of the argument, presented later in Schanberg's Pulitzer award speech, that the basic flaw of American policy in South East Asia lay in its failure to take into account the realities of Cambodian culture. 'You don't start a peasant feud,' Joffé sum-

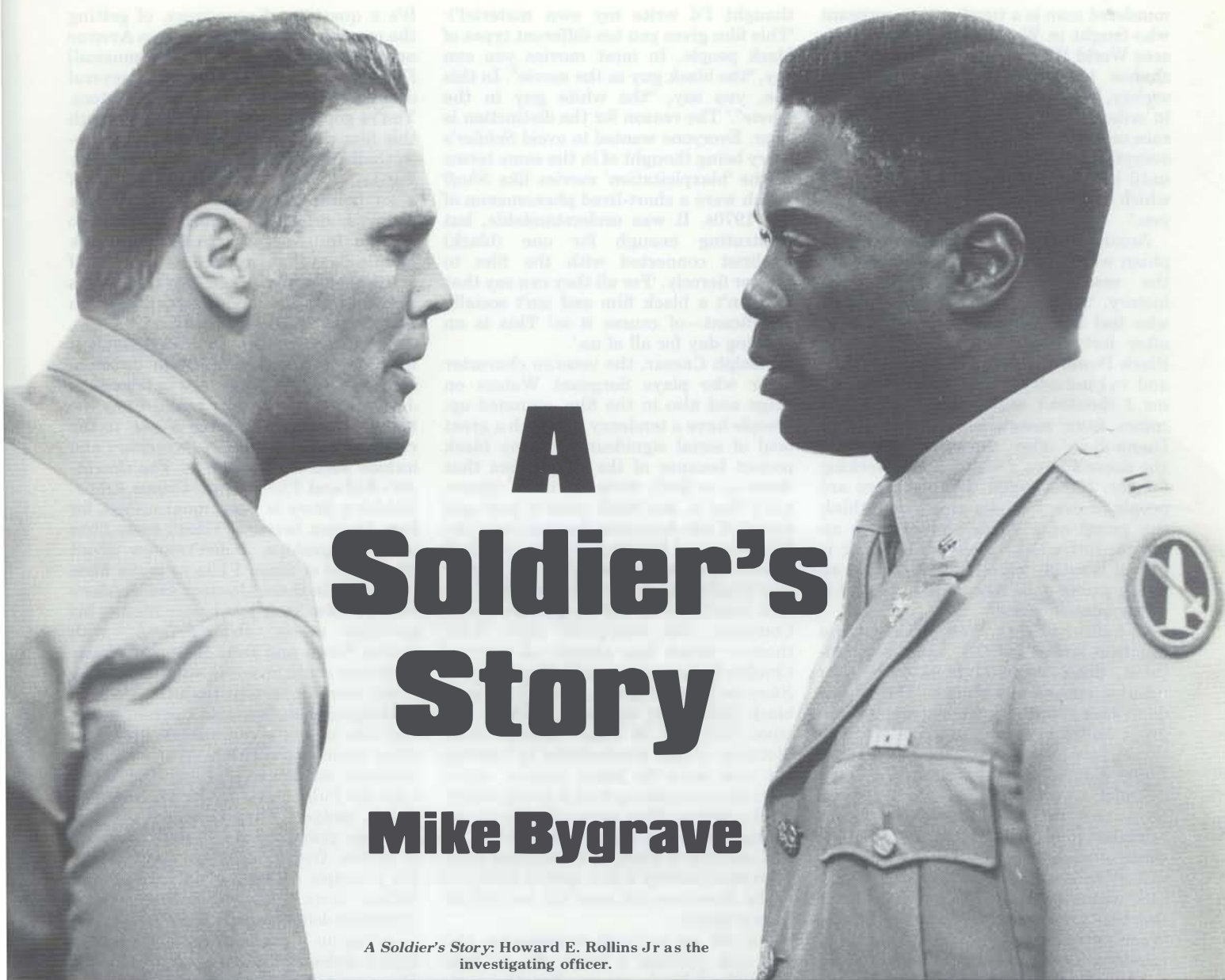
marises the argument, 'unless you mean to carry it through. It was a lack to ignore the fact that by dividing the country they would unleash something very dangerous.' The overlaying of Puccini's 'Nessun dorma' over a scene where Schanberg fast-forwards a video chronicle of Nixon's policy in Cambodia has a remarkable power.

There is also a rich subtext, however, which opens up the film to deeper analysis. Phnom Penh is a city receiving support from the American government, but starving people lead dogs to the cooking pot and patients writhe in pain from blast injuries because of a shortage of painkillers. The impact of Buddhism on Cambodian culture is never discussed, but the first image after the credits is of two Buddhist monks swanning under an umbrella. There follows a repetition of Buddhist images so that, as Joffé explains it, 'people were aware of a Buddhist culture that was under threat but meaningful and part of the structure of life.' These powerful submerged references provoke questions before they offer answers. 'The images,' says Joffé, 'had to have as many resonances as people were prepared to take.'

Puttnam has spoken of *The Killing Fields* as a new film genre: unpackaged political Hollywood. The claim may be exaggerated, but the film's accomplishment does provide some vindication for the Goldcrest-style way of making British films. It shows that there is scope, given backing from a well-financed British company and a canny producer with a sophisticated approach to American sensitivities, to use the resources of Hollywood for work that is authentic and carries messages that go against the grain of mainstream American filmmaking. 'The company has to remain distinctive,' says Goldcrest's James Lee. 'The only way that we are going to get any distribution support in America is if our films are sufficiently different.' ■

Left to right: Julian Sands, Sam Waterston, John Malkovich.





A Soldier's Story

Mike Bygrave

A Soldier's Story: Howard E. Rollins Jr as the investigating officer.

There is a lot of history in the long, slightly dilapidated barracks with their dusty, spartan interiors, 1,200 of them lined up in rows on the 72,000 acres of Fort Chaffee, Arkansas. A few years back, Chaffee made the national news when it was turned into a resettlement camp for Cuban refugees. Mostly, though, it lies empty three-quarters of the year, coming alive only in the summers when the National Guard—a kind of American Territorial Army—uses it for training.

In the Second World War, Chaffee was home for three armoured divisions of the then segregated US Army. German prisoners of war also lived here. When singer Lena Horne visited the base to entertain the black troops, she saw how the black soldiers' living conditions were worse than those of the pows. The experience, she has often said, prompted her involvement in the Civil Rights movement.

Today, Fort Chaffee is once again at the confluence of race and show business, serving as the chief location for the filming of *A Soldier's Story*. In an otherwise deserted barrack room, director

Norman Jewison and his cameraman Russell Boyd (who shot Peter Weir's early films and Bruce Beresford's *Tender Mercies*) are setting up a scene with their star, Howard E. Rollins Jr. Rollins plays a black captain, sent to investigate the murder of an unpopular black sergeant on a Southern army base in 1944. He is the first black officer his colleagues—white and black alike—have ever seen, and no one knows how to accommodate him. He can't sleep with the black rank and file soldiers or among the white officers, so he ends up in a barracks all to himself. Here he is visited by Dennis Lipscomb, playing a sympathetic white captain struggling to rethink his own prejudices, who tells him, 'Give this [investigation] up! Whites down here won't see their duty—or justice. They'll see you!'

It's a tense scene, played to the hilt by both men. Though it must be well over 80 degrees in the Arkansas night, abetted by the arc lights, Jewison orders Rollins to be 'sweated down' more. The actor submits calmly to the process. Both in his role as the cool investigator who puts the racial cat among the pigeons and in

the way he is playing it, Rollins evokes memories of Sidney Poitier in *In the Heat of the Night*, the film Jewison directed twenty years ago (winning Oscars for himself and for Rod Steiger). Jewison, a stocky, mild-mannered man with a piebald beard, dressed in T-shirt and jeans, seems stirred by the sense of *déjà vu*. 'Both Sidney and Howard are handsome men with great dignity,' he says. 'There's even a physical resemblance sometimes—when Howard speaks softly, he has the same kind of catlike intensity that Sidney has.'

The scene starts up again and a group of black journalists, flown in by Columbia Pictures from all over America, crowd forward for a better view. They are here to record what they regard as a breakthrough film—a film with a mainly black cast acting in a serious drama about blacks; something as rare in Hollywood in 1984 as a black officer was in the US Army circa 1944.

A Soldier's Story is based on the Pulitzer Prize-winning play by Charles Fuller. The play probes both black attitudes and white racism within the context of a murder mystery. The

murdered man is a tough career sergeant who fought in World War One and who sees World War Two as the black man's chance to win acceptance by white society, but only if he puts his own house in order first. Sergeant Waters feels his race must become 'whiter than white', do everything the whites do but better, until he finds out, in his despairing cry which frames the action, 'They still hate you.'

According to Fuller, a gentle Philadelphian whose favourite part of writing is the research into black American history, 'I think you'll still find people who feel like Waters even today, even after forty years of Civil Rights and Black Power. I know people in the [film and tv] industry, black people who tell me I shouldn't work with blacks; that comes from somewhere. I went in to Diana Ross' office the other week and she doesn't have a single black working for her. Not a typist. I think there are people in every ethnic group who think the group as a whole should have an image. But what's really interesting is that it is much more criminal within an ethnic group to be who you are than it is to the outside world.'

In *Soldier's Story*, Waters conceives a fanatical hatred for 'C.J.', an unsophisticated, illiterate rural black who is a natural athlete and singer. 'The whites don't care about C.J. He can sing, he's a great ballplayer, hey! It's Waters who thinks he's letting down the black race,' Fuller points out.

Fuller apart, most of the *Soldier's Story* cast and production team were reluctant to talk about the racial significance of the film. On the other hand, that was all the visiting journalists wanted to talk about. A split developed between the two groups, symbolised by Denzel Washington (who plays Petersen, the role for which he won an Obie Award on the New York stage). 'I'm not doing what I'm doing for "us", you know,' he burst out to the black reporters. 'I'm doing it for me and my family. I am very interested in the image I present, but that's all. If anything, my choice of a role might be for "us", but once I've made it, I do it for myself and for the role. Someone once asked me how I thought forty million black people would feel about a film I was in. Man, I can't work for forty million black people!'

Partly it was a generation gap. Most of the black journalists were older and most of the actors were young and eager to point out that they are actors first, black second. It was the same message Charles Fuller put across by saying, 'I'm always asked, "Are you a black writer or are you just a writer?"' Americans like to reduce things to categories. They're frightened of things that don't come in pigeonholes.'

The *Soldier's Story* cast were equally insistent that they weren't making a 'black film'—just a film about Americans who happen to be black. Said Robert Townsend, who works both as an actor and as a stand-up comedian in Los Angeles ('all the parts for guys like me are pimps, junkies and slaves, so I

thought I'd write my own material'): 'This film gives you ten different types of black people. In most movies you can say, "the black guy in the movie". In this one, you say, "the white guy in the movie".' The reason for the distinction is clear. Everyone wanted to avoid *Soldier's Story* being thought of in the same terms as the 'blaxploitation' movies like *Shaft* which were a short-lived phenomenon of the 1970s. It was understandable, but frustrating enough for one (black) publicist connected with the film to mutter fiercely, 'For all they can say that this isn't a black film and isn't socially significant—of course it is! This is an exciting day for all of us.'

Adolph Caesar, the veteran character actor who plays Sergeant Waters on stage and also in the film, summed up: 'People have a tendency to attach a great deal of social significance to any black project because of the simple fact that there is so little work for black actors. Let's face it, the black man is part and parcel of the American tapestry and the dimensions of his involvement still need to be elucidated in detail.' While Caesar was clearly delighted about the film, his own loyalty is to the Negro Ensemble Company, the non-profit New York theatre which has staged all four of Charles Fuller's plays, including *Soldier's Story* (or *Soldier's Play*). 'We are the only black institution in the theatre which has stood the test of time,' Caesar says. 'Because of our productivity in turning out new work by black writers, we've more or less come up with a group of new black classics. Now we're starting to see young actors coming to audition for us and instead of doing a monologue from Shakespeare they'll do a speech from one of the shows we did over the last ten or fifteen years.'

For all its cultural importance, the NEC can provide a home for a mere handful of black actors. For the rest, prospects are grim in America as a whole, and in Hollywood in particular. Blacks and other minorities make up less than 10 per cent of leading roles in tv and films while comprising 20 per cent of the population (11.5 per cent of the Screen Actors Guild's 55,000 members are from ethnic minorities). So entrenched is the situation that a bill currently before the California State Assembly calls for a full investigation of Hollywood's treatment of both women and 'people of colour'.

Here was something journalists and actors alike could agree on, but still the emphasis differed. Young and very different in mood from the generations of the 1960s and 70s, the actors in *Soldier's Story* seemed to accept that their chances of working depended on underlying economic realities. It was left to the older journalists to talk about discrimination.

Larry Riley, who plays the ill-starred C.J., says, 'The threatened part of a career for black actors is prime of life black males. Nobody wants to tell that story. You get older, balding guys who work and you get the young Gary Colemans and Michael Jackson types.

It's a question of economics, of getting the message through to Madison Avenue and the like. Right after [the musical] *Dreamgirls* became a hit, I saw several commercials on tv with black actors. You're going to get the same thing with this film, if it's a hit. Otherwise, a pro-football player with exposure every Sunday can sell your toothpaste a hell of a lot better than Larry Riley, asshole actor. I do think something has to change in society. I think the black middle-class has a need to see itself actualised in film or in print, it has a right to that. As to how that change can be brought about, I don't know.'

Somebody who knows how difficult it is to bring about is Norman Jewison. Born in Canada and trained in television, Jewison's feature films range from the benign (*In the Heat of the Night*) to the ridiculous (*Jesus Christ, Superstar*) and include such stylish hits as *The Cincinnati Kid* and *The Thomas Crown Affair*. *Soldier's Story* is a personal project for him, he says, because, 'I don't make films about spaceships. I don't know about those kind of films. I like to make films with ideas in them.' Jewison saw *Soldier's Play* in New York just before filming his previous movie, *Best Friends*, with Goldie Hawn and Burt Reynolds. 'I saw that here could be a film with a meaning that's more important than the story.'

Hollywood studios didn't agree, seeing the film as 'not a commercial project in their terms.' Eventually, Warner's gave Jewison money to develop the script (also by Fuller) and pledged a 5 million dollar budget. They dropped out and Jewison promptly went and asked for 6 million from Columbia, according to his principle of 'falling up rather than falling down.' The final budget was 6,200,000 dollars for ten weeks of location shooting on a period film—a very tight figure indeed—though Jewison took a Directors Guild minimum fee of 150,000 dollars (compared with the 1.25 million he received for *Best Friends*). Everyone had to make sacrifices.

That included the film's star, Howard Rollins, whom Jewison chose because, 'There are only three black male stars in America—Richard Pryor, Eddie Murphy and Sidney Poitier. I didn't feel Pryor and Murphy were right for the role and Poitier is maybe a little too old.' Of all the young cast, Rollins retains a residual bitterness. He has gone the farthest in his career of any of them and so far he's been stopped dead in his tracks. Despite good notices and an Oscar nomination for his portrayal of the black revolutionary, 'Coalhouse Walker', in *Ragtime*, no more film work came his way and Rollins has been forced back into daytime tv soap opera, almost the lowest rung of the acting ladder. If he were white, he'd be a major star by now. Even if the timing were different, if these were the late 1960s—early 1970s and Hollywood was making liberal films which needed a token black, he'd be a star à la Sidney Poitier. They're not and he's not, and he knows it.

On the other hand, some things have changed, and for the better, since Jewison

filmed *In the Heat of the Night* back in 1967. Then, as now, he was working with black actors in the South. 'Heat of the Night' took place in Sparta, Mississippi,' Jewison recalls, 'and Poitier said to me, "No way I'm going south of the Mason-Dixon line. I've had it with those crackers." I found out afterwards that he and Belafonte had been in a car in Georgia and they were chased and the car had crashed. So I filmed in southern Illinois, but for the cotton-picking scenes I had to cross over into Tennessee. I told Sidney, "You've got to give me three days." And they were three very tense days. Sidney was staying at a Holiday Inn and in those days blacks just didn't stay in Holiday Inns. We had trouble with the local sheriff . . . you name it.'

Seventeen years later, the Sheraton in Fort Smith (the nearby town to Fort Chaffee) apparently welcomed the cast of *Soldier's Story* with open arms. Arkansas is a dirt-poor state whose televisual young Governor, Bill Clinton, is making a sustained attempt to attract movie revenue. (He offers a 5 per cent refund on all money film companies spend with local businesses; *Soldier's Story* was the first production to claim the refund.) For their part, the film's actors seemed haunted by none of the demons of previous generations. Says David Allen Grier, 'We drove around to these redneck bars. One bar we hit, they said we were the first blacks ever to come in there. The

Norman Jewison (in baseball cap) on location.



rednecks look at you—but you get out those 50 and 100 dollar bills and they'll take your money.' Nevertheless, the cast were all given a special phone number to call should they get in any trouble.

Norman Jewison says: 'You've only got to look at *Soldier's Story* itself to see how much has changed—this was a time when Eisenhower was saying he didn't know if coloured troops could fight, when there were only 55 black officers in the entire US Army, when the services were still segregated. Once you legislate all those myths of racism away, people accept very quickly, especially in the South where whites and blacks truly live side by side.'

Or do they? Fort Smith's 3,500-odd blacks have an unemployment rate around 50 per cent and seem so sunk in indifference that not even the excitement of a Hollywood movie could rouse them (to find enough paid extras, they had to send Rollins and other actors to a local park to make a personal pitch). Nor were the visiting black journalists at all convinced that the New South wasn't just the acceptable face of racism.

'How many police do they have in this town?' they quizzed the coach driver.

'Forty or fifty.'

'Any black?'

'Oh, sure . . . there's one.'

Raucous laughter from the journalists, followed by a shout, 'and they don't let him out on the street!'

'Well,' said the coach driver slowly, 'he doesn't have to go out on the street no more, no.'

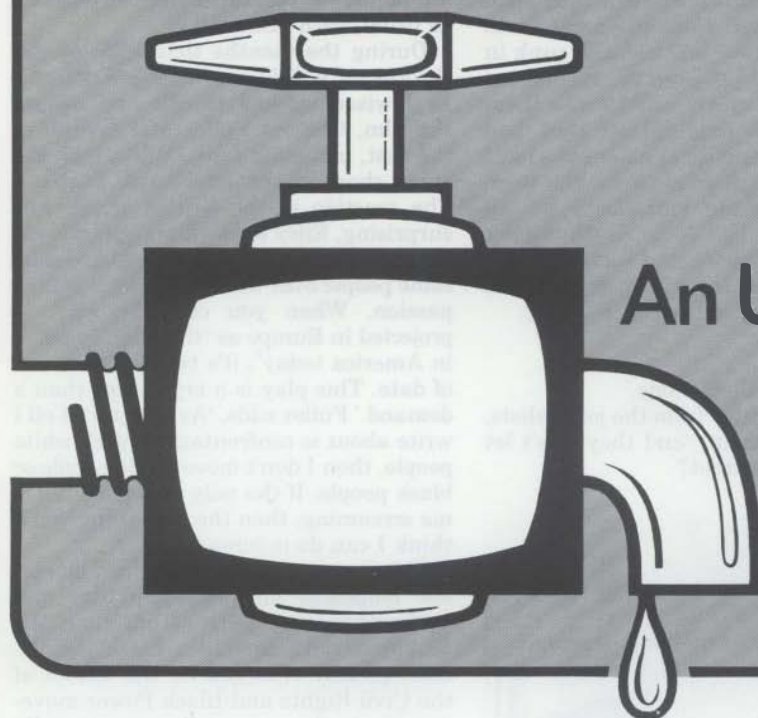
While the cast, like any actors anywhere, were just glad to be working, *Soldier's Story* did have a special meaning for the whites who worked on the film. According to Don Levy, the (white) unit publicist, 'I feel I've learned something about black people. I've never worked with a group of black people before, or been the only white guy at a restaurant table, and you know what, it's great.' Levy also confirmed that 'a special effort was made' to recruit black crew members. 'Not just because they were black, though. They had to be good, too.' The result was a union crew 'one third black instead of, as usual, with one black.'

During the months that followed the shooting of *A Soldier's Story* in Arkansas, as Jewison worked to edit and release the film, Charles Fuller and several of the cast, including Larry Riley, took the stage show to the Edinburgh Festival. The reaction of the British critics was surprising, Riley says. 'They either loved it or they hated it. On the negative side, some people over there thought it lacked passion. When you consider what is projected in Europe as "the black problem in America today", it's twenty years out of date. This play is a cry rather than a demand.' Fuller adds, 'As a writer, if all I write about is confrontations with white people, then I don't move white people or black people. If the only thing you see is me screaming, then the only thing you'll think I can do is scream.'

This new coolness of American blacks, the emphasis on professionalism and performance, the hire rather than the fire next time, among a black middle-class greatly enlarged by the fallout of the Civil Rights and Black Power movements, is by no means universally popular, even among their fellows. Jack Slater was one of the black journalists in Arkansas; in general an admirer of *Soldier's Story*, he greeted the finished film with an anguished column in the *Los Angeles Times* describing his own feelings that, 'self-hate exists among us [blacks] almost as a norm . . . to live black in white America is to belong in a kind of contradictory no man's land. It is, above all, to live in a state of perpetual absurdity . . . in a world that pushes us every day towards self-immolation.'

Such open anger is unfashionable. Letters came in denouncing Slater from blacks buttoning down their corporate collars and out to prove themselves as, in Hollywood's favourite phrase, 'valuable pieces of manpower'. But it is an anger Charles Fuller would recognise even though he chooses to defuse it in himself with humour and irony. 'I was in London walking down the street,' he told me, 'and some guys were driving by and they called me a racial name. So I turned and started shouting, "Goddam . . . son of a . . ." And they said, "Oh. You're an American." "Yes, I'm an American, you goddam . . ." "Hey, we're sorry, we didn't know. Enjoy your stay!"' He shook his head. 'Isn't that incredible? Maybe they do still hate you.'

TURNING ON THE TELEVISION TAP



An Up-Date on Cable
TV, Satellites,
DBS and Video
John Chittock

When John Logie Baird gave a demonstration of television in 1926 to forty members of the Royal Institution (in what is now Bianchi's Restaurant in Frith Street, Soho), one cynic said, 'Well, what's the good of it when you've got it?' Much later, a not dissimilar view was succinctly put by C. P. Scott. 'Television, no good will come of it; the word is half Greek and half Latin.'

The cinema industry would agree, especially as British Film Year approaches with the desperate aim to raise attendances at the local picture house by four per cent. But, as we all know, there are plenty of other people who believe that a great deal of good can come out of television, especially if measured in pounds and pence. The entrepreneurs remember the early days of ITV, and the licence to print money, and hope that developments of recent times may provide another bandwagon for those who missed the first. In particular, they have read the stories about cable and satellite tv in the US—where Ted Turner is assumed to have made millions with his news service (but hasn't) and the cable networks are portrayed as big business (but ABC Inc says of them 'only those who can profit from a small audience will be able to profit at all').

The excitement in Britain over cable,

satellite and DBS really owes more to media coverage than economic reality. Following in the wake of video—which everyone rashly dismissed and later discovered was a bonanza—there has been an expectancy that cable and satellite tv might repeat the same pattern. But as investors and others now get more deeply involved in their various projects, a cautious if not gloomy view is beginning to emerge. Meanwhile, however, video goes on from strength to strength, pulling down a few of the get-rich-quick high street operators as it goes, but now heading towards a 50 per cent penetration of VCRs in all UK TV homes. Soon, the penetration should be 40 per cent, and the ultimate ceiling has been revised by one company—JVC of Japan—from 50-60 per cent to 70-80 per cent.

With so much television on tap, the means by which it reaches the home tv set seems almost irrelevant. The attraction, of course, is movies, even though video and cable have been called 'discriminatory television' catering for minority interests. The metaphor of turning on the television tap may not be inappropriate because, with so many outlets coming on stream, the dangers of dilution—even drought—begin to concentrate the mind.

Whereas once the cinema, and then television, released a trickle of material to be enjoyed by a mass audience, the situation is reversing. A flood of programming is now being offered to an increasingly fragmented audience. And the razzmatazz of the technology is misleading everyone into believing that this is no more expensive or complicated to achieve than traditional methods of distribution.

THE TECHNOLOGY

Pie in the Sky

Broadcast television suffers from a number of technical shortcomings, not least of which has to do with reception and picture quality. An ideally sited television aerial can receive signals only as far away as a direct line of sight with the transmitter (freak conditions excepted); that means about seventy miles. If the transmitter can be sited well above ground level, such as many miles up in the sky, ground aerials over a much larger area will be able to 'see' it. Thus

the geostationary satellite, which opens up the possibility of more television channels without the reception problems associated with ground-to-ground relay.

There are, however, a number of difficulties in this apparently elegant method of beaming television signals. First is cost: the joint UK venture for DBS (involving the BBC, ITV companies and others) is estimated to run up a bill of £400m. And this for a satellite which may have a life of only seven years, provided nothing goes wrong with it in the meantime. Which is why the BBC, which rashly opted to take two of the channels offered by the Home Office, changed its mind within weeks and sought a partnership with ITV.

A second uncomfortable problem is concerned with politics. That seventy mile limitation of terrestrial television is rather convenient for countries living cheek by jowl; it keeps out the Tele-luxembourgs of this world. No wonder, then, that some countries have reacted strongly to a Luxembourg plan for a satellite TV service beamed at 200m homes across Europe—in violation of numerous agreements. France feels especially threatened and says it will not allow 'Coca-Cola satellites to attack our artistic and cultural integrity.'

The third problem, most easily overlooked, is how those millions of homes will actually be reached. One expectation is by direct reception via dish aeriels—hence the term Direct Broadcasting by Satellite. But a dish aerial needs to be lined up to point at the satellite with considerably greater accuracy than a conventional TV aerial, probably to within one or two degrees at present signal strengths. And it must stay accurately pointed, in wind, hail, snow and heat-waves, without attention—quite an engineering installation for a dish which at the present state of the art can be still as large as 90cm in diameter. The cost of putting up a DBS aerial is another factor. Predictions of installation charges are not readily volunteered. They will certainly not be in the £30 to £40 region of a standard lash-it-up and wire-it-in aerial handled by boys in trainer shoes. And the dish aerial itself is expected to cost anything from £200 to £500 with its ancillary electronics.

All this is to receive signals from one satellite. Other satellites will need either separately aimed dishes, or a very expensive steerable aerial. None the less, there are hopes that aerial design improvements will bring prices down dramatically, as for example in the claim of Sir Clive Sinclair that he will introduce a flat satellite aerial at only £100. Meanwhile, it looks expensive for the DBS enthusiast—and still relies on a direct line of sight with the satellite (viz, if a block of flats stands in the way, there is less chance of picking up the signals than with conventional broadcast television).

All of which points to satellite television finding most of its audience via cable television. Namely, the local cable station puts up the dish aeriels and relays the programmes by cable to its own network of subscribers.

THE TECHNOLOGY

Stars in the Ground

This indeed is how cable television in Britain will obtain most of its programmes. Already a number of the services now available—such as Thorn EMI's Movie Channel—are being distributed to cable stations via British Telecom's Intelsat V. At Swindon, for example, Thorn EMI have established a so-called 'aerial farm' which uses various dishes to pull in the signals and then relay them (by optical fibres) to their cable distribution station for Swindon nearly two miles away.

That term 'optical fibres' provides another example where technology has confused everyone. Optical fibres (or fibre optics) have been joined with co-axial, tree-and-branch, switched star and all other forms of nomenclature to smother cable TV with a layer of mystique. Fibre optics are only a technically more elegant replacement for co-axial cables (as used in current TV aerial connections). A cable TV network using fibre optics will cost more, but offers greater flexibility in the quality and range of signal information it can carry. Switched star and tree-and-branch describe alternative configurations for the way the cables or optical fibres are laid. The former provides each home with a single connection to a local, automatic switching centre; the viewer's choice of channel is signalled (via the keypad) to the switching centre, which then connects it to the chosen programme from the many available coming in on a trunk line to the centre. This is analogous to the telephone connected via a central switchboard to any other phone.

Tree-and-branch effectively sends all available programmes down one cable to the viewer's TV set, rather in the way they arrive at the set from a TV aerial. The television receiver relies on a tuner unit to pick out the right channel, as indeed it does with broadcast signals; in practice, this means that there is a limitation on the number of channels that can be fed into each home without additional cabling. Switched star does not require TV sets to be equipped with tuners, and is expandable at the switching centre without interfering with the cable links to each home. In consequence, the government is trying to encourage cable operators to install switched star, by offering them longer licence periods than with tree-and-branch.

The arguments over these parts of the technology have subsided, but new issues and problems seem to crop up daily. In the government's rush to see Britain cabled, the supply of switchgear and other components has in some cases held up progress. At least one cable operator complains that British Telecom has suddenly required local cables to be laid deeper than originally expected, adding more to the costs. And all these locally sited switching centres threaten environ-

mental intrusion—a point not generally realised—with boxes sprouting up from pavements at intervals of less than 200 metres or so. The Department of the Environment is clearing aside some of the planning laws that might affect such issues, and the Department of Employment takes some hope from all the new manufacturing jobs that the cabling of Britain is creating.

THE POLITICS AND ECONOMICS

Who Dares Wins?

Even more confusing than the technology have been the political and economic struggles surrounding cable in particular, satellite TV in general. It is not widely appreciated that Britain has been providing cable services since before the Second World War, namely to relay radio programmes. In 1951, television was added to this facility by Visionhire in Gloucester, and from that moment on, cable television has become a slow and never-ending political struggle.

The original cable TV services were restricted by the UK government to providing only the relay of existing broadcast services. Brief experiments were later permitted in the few areas available on cable—such as a Pay TV trial in 1966 in London—and the setting up of the locally originated community TV programmes at Greenwich, Swindon, Bristol, Sheffield and Wellingborough. During this period, when only the Greenwich service survived as a community project, the Cable Television Association of Great Britain conducted a skilful campaign to persuade the government to loosen up the restrictions. A two-year subscription service for movies, on one channel only, was subsequently permitted in thirteen towns.

The outcome of these trials and pressures was the White Paper of April 1983 (*The Development of Cable Systems and Services*, Cmd 8866). This cleared the way for existing cable TV networks to offer additional programme services, including feature films. But, since the capacity of these old systems has generally been only four or five channels, a requirement imposed is that the freeing of these channels for new paid-for services would be permitted only if subscribers were provided (free of charge) with other means (viz, aeriels) of receiving the four broadcast channels.

Systems now functioning in this way with interim licences include over fifty operated by Rediffusion in towns such as Reading, Hull and Bristol. The real thrust in cable television is hoped for, however, in the so-called 'new build' stations, where successful applicants are laying new networks designed to conform to the longer term government specification—viz, a minimum 30 channel

capacity, some interactive capability (as for home shopping and banking services), and a spread of programming services ranging from 'must carry' (broadcast tv) to material 'which will be in the best interests of the whole community.' Thus not only feature films, but local interest programmes, educational channels, even in some a full teletext service.

The incentive for the new build stations is the provision of longer licence periods—originally twenty years for switched star systems against twelve years for tree-and-branch (but the latter has now been extended to fifteen years as a palliative for the removal of 100 per cent capital allowances in the 1984 budget). No restrictions are being applied on the screening of new films—the cinema industry wanted a time delay following their first release. And advertising can be carried.

In practice, the new build operators are offering subscribers channels under two broad headings: Basic and Premium. The Basic channels carry a monthly subscription charge of anything from £5 to £9 and provide along with the 'must carry' programmes a range of general and special interest stranding supported by advertising. This material includes channels such as 'lifestyle' (anything from cookery to health), children's, education, community programmes and so on. The Premium tiers—at additional rates of £7 to £12 per month—carry the feature films and maybe high quality

arts and special performance programmes, but not advertising.

New build stations cost a great deal of money to install: at least £30m for 100,000 homes. Such investment has to be recovered, of course, within the licence period. And this is where the 'who dares wins' becomes a major factor.

The economists have been hard at work on their micros and main frames constructing models of the ideal cable tv town. It must have a minimum number of homes populated by people who conform to very rigid parameters—e.g. not too old, plenty of children, not too low down the wages scale. These calculations have to be related to the demographic spread and the local costs of passing all the homes involved. The mathematics are finely balanced. Some areas provide a viable permutation of all the parameters (e.g. Westminster); others may be running close (e.g. Glasgow). Delays caused not only by the supply of equipment, but by the formalities in the government actually issuing the licences (there have been legislative tangles to sort out) have led to some gloom in the cable industry. The removal of 100 per cent capital allowances deepened that gloom. And the realisation that programmes do not grow on trees—and do cost money—has killed much of the original cable euphoria. Even worse, despite the recruitment of large sales forces (Rediffusion have taken on 1,400 people for that purpose), subscriber responses have not always

been up to the forecasts made by the marketing experts.

The government has maintained a fairly bland attitude during this period. Its own objective in largely giving the cable industry what it wanted was to provide a catalyst for the spread of information technology—albeit entertainment led with the help of feature films. Understandably, the cinema industry is not amused. Only the suppliers of the programmes (the producers and the distributors) can afford to feel relaxed; at least, so long as they merely regard cable as just another market and not an end in itself (there is no way that cable can provide returns sufficient to finance movies without other sources of revenue). So, for the majors in the film industry, cable is a rather handy replacement for the ailing cinema. It pays on results, just like the box-office, and moves the concept of television closer to the original notion of the paying audience at the local Odeon.

THE PROGRAMME MAZE

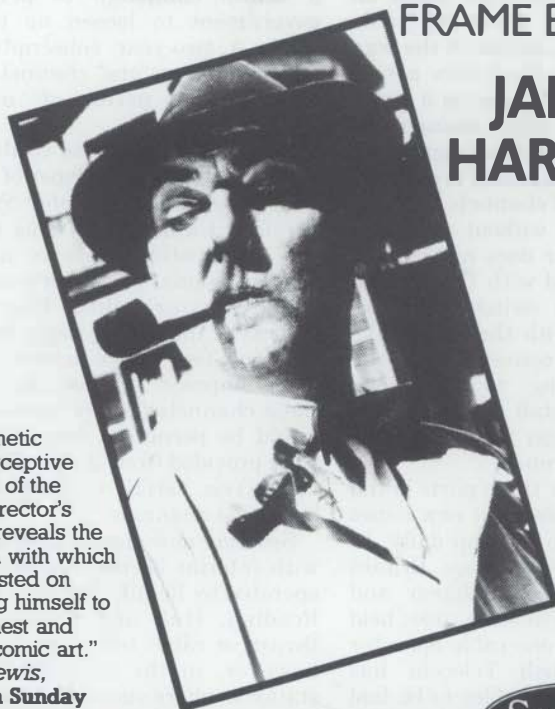
Another Country

If what has been written so far seems rather complex, the lining up of forces

JACQUES TATI

FRAME BY FRAME

JAMES
HARDING



"This sympathetic and perceptive account of the actor/director's career reveals the heroism with which Tati insisted on devoting himself to the highest and purest comic art."
Peter Lewis,
Mail on Sunday



£12.95

Fully illustrated

Secker &
Warburg

to provide programmes for cable and satellite tv is more like a nightmare of Dr Caligari. By the time this article appears, there will have been more mergers, withdrawals and fresh entrants. They cover everything from the provision of a games channel (by W. H. Smith) to the most intricate network of partnerships in offering feature films to the operators.

As *Screen Digest* revealed in its September 1984 issue, all the Hollywood majors have links with one or other of the UK movie channels; leading them to a more direct involvement in British cable than the law allows them in the US. The chart produced by *Screen Digest* to show this intricate web of cross-ownerships and joint ventures finishes up looking like a printed circuit from a television camera.

In addition, all manner of specialised programme services have been set up, initially for the UK, but now serving Europe as well. Thus Rupert Murdoch's Sky Channel, a mix of sport, music and general entertainment beamed by satellite to cable stations across Europe. Screen Sport likewise. And Thorn EMI has come out unscathed in the merger of what were originally three rival music channels, now just one purveying mostly pop videos. These are all now operational, as is Thorn EMI's children's channel. Others promised include a channel of outstanding sponsored documentaries (Spectrum), 'lifestyle' (family interest, health, hobbies, etc) and of course arts and culture.

Very commendable schemes are also in hand to establish local community programme services, the value of which has been well demonstrated in the past at Swindon and Greenwich. Here will be a way for regional video workshops to reach larger audiences, and even to have access to better technical facilities than many at present possess.

PROGNOSIS

1984 and After

Cable television, satellite tv and DBS—when it comes to it you can't really have one without the other—have suffered from the excesses of an ill-informed press, and a rarely better-informed gaggle of experts, consultants and conferences. The subjects have been hyped to a degree where no outcome could hope to be anything other than an anticlimax. The expectations have been generally too high.

Cable television, however, is here to stay. The government wants it, the industry is too far down the road to turn back, and there are enough unique benefits about it maybe even to encourage the public to want it. No one doubts that it will be a long haul, with losses for some, but its ultimate success will emerge when both operators and viewers recognise that cable is a highly selective medium,

not a mass medium like the cinema and broadcast television. And the mystery which currently surrounds the 'interactive' services of cable will assume a reality that may genuinely capture the imagination when viewers recognise its potential (paying bills, playing chess, even sending messages to friends—not the dream of a tabloid journalist, but all available within the next year or two).

As satellite services become well-established, they too can begin to offer benefits which are genuinely different. No longer simply another way of distributing television, but a technical opportunity for achieving much better picture quality. The IBA's proposed C-MAC system for the UK DBS services should bring to television viewing a standard of picture quality hitherto not experienced. Satellite tv also offers better prospects for stereo sound channels and even the introduction of high definition television. The latter, already demonstrated terrestrially by Sony and others, will bring the cinema and television even closer together. Auditoria could screen films 'distributed' to them by satellite, albeit using electronic rather than film projection. In quality terms, it may be closer to conventional film projection than many may believe possible; certainly the resolution claimed for some HDTV systems now actually exceeds that of 35mm film.

VIDEO

Terms of Endearment

Suddenly, in the face of these almost unimaginable developments, video seems a well-established and even comfortable old friend. No one any longer can dismiss it. More people are now watching movies on video in one week than in the cinema in one year. And why shouldn't they? The purists have argued that the experience bears no comparison. Yet projection standards in most cinemas usually leave much to be desired, and the pleasure of watching a film on video in a quiet and comfortable sitting room, free of competing conversations and the smell of orange peel, means quite a lot to some people.

Video is also undergoing developments which will make it more attractive in the future to movie watchers. The first—the availability of a substantial title range—has happened already. The second—improvement in picture quality—is occurring continuously, initially with better duplicating technology and in the future with even higher quality VCRs. The third, with us now, is hi-fi stereo sound, at its best up to the quality of any domestic hi-fi system.

Lurking forever in the shadows, another victim of technological misrepresentation, is the video disc. The headlines—'RCA drops video disc project', 'CBS abandons video discs'—have all given fodder for those who quip 'I told you so.'

But the video disc is alive and well, and like some of the other derided technologies, it is beginning to show how it can do things which open up new concepts in the way we regard moving pictures. The survivor is the optical video disc, a medium that will carry *Gandhi* on two millimetres of bookshelf space without the colours fading as they will, inevitably, on the original film prints.

The optical video disc, introduced by Philips but now supported by Pioneer and even Sony, is establishing itself initially because of professional and educational interest. Literally scores of projects worldwide are now making use of the technology—such as the Library of Congress in Washington (its document and photographic archives available on a take-away disc) and countless educational programmes (the Open University one of many now developing such applications). These specialised uses are spilling back into the consumer market, and the much berated disc could even prove a challenge to cable tv. At the Post Office Research Centre at Martlesham in Suffolk, banks of video disc players are already being used in an experimental cable lash-up, to provide movies more conveniently than on tape or film. But then why bother with the cable when you can have the discs at home? It may be argued that cable brings every viewer a chance to plug into a vast library without keeping movies at home on the shelf. But the parallel with books is inevitable—possession is preferred.

In the end, the public will decide how things actually happen. It is worth remembering that the cynical members of the Royal Institution were wrong fifty-nine years ago in their view of television. Which just goes to prove how little the experts can be trusted.

POSTSCRIPT

The prediction in this article that, by the time it appears, there will have been 'more mergers, withdrawals and fresh entrants', has been confirmed with almost indecent haste. One of Britain's longest established operators in the cable relay business—Visionhire—has decided to withdraw from that side of its business (it is also involved in tv rental) and has failed to find a buyer to take over the cable interests; these include a 'new town' network in Scotland. And Rediffusion, the biggest cable operator in the UK (some would say the backbone of the cable interest), has sold out its complete cable business to Robert Maxwell. The latter news is a particularly extraordinary turn of events because Rediffusion has long been one of the leading protagonists in the lobby which successfully persuaded the Government to de-restrict cable television. As these final words are written, it is now anyone's guess what the next few weeks may bring . . . ■

If ever conditions were right for the emergence of a 'new wave', they were in the Hong Kong film industry in 1979. All the elements in the equation were in place. Audience figures remained buoyant, but the established industry was in decline. Shaw Brothers, the oldest surviving major producer/distributor/exhibitor, had halved its level of production and was widely believed to be on the verge of closing down. Seven of the year's ten highest-grossing local films were independent productions. Veteran directors found themselves unable to raise backing for their films; many, like King Hu, moved over to the more conservative film industry of Taiwan. And some ten prominent young directors simultaneously left jobs in television and began making their first features, in all cases for independent producers. They turned out to be the vanguard of a much larger group: in the last five years, well over sixty young directors have displaced virtually all the established figures in the industry. It has been easier for a new director to make his or her first feature in Hong Kong than in any other film industry in the world. The term 'new wave' (*xin langchao* in Mandarin) was first used in connection with the film industry in 1979. But has there been one?

In 1979, Hong Kong was peaking after nearly three decades of drastic change and development. The staid and sleepy colonial port of the early 1950s had been transformed into a vastly overcrowded shanty-town by a massive influx of immigrants, mostly refugees from the Chinese mainland, and then the economic boom of the 1960s turned the city into a real metropolis, a cross between Manhattan and Tokyo in many ways more cosmopolitan than either. As the population expanded, so did the birth rate. The first substantial generation of young people born and raised in Hong Kong came of age in the late 1970s, and found themselves comprising more than 50 per cent of the total population. They were in no sense a generation of dissidents, but their needs, tastes and impulses were very different from their parents'—partly because few of them had any first-hand experience of life in mainland China, partly because a significant number had had the chance to study abroad. Hong Kong's limited and generally backward-looking culture neither satisfied nor contained them. Inevitably, something had to give. The first signs of a break with tradition appeared in tv production in the mid-1970s; it could only be a matter of time before the film industry caught up.

There is no doubt that important changes have occurred in Hong Kong cinema in the past five years, or that the most interesting of the recent films could not have been made before 1979. A few of them have even won a modest degree of acceptance from the western film establishment as 'art movies': Allen Fong's *Father and Son* and *Ah Ying* and Ann Hui's *The Story of Woo Viet* and *Boat People* have had numerous festival screenings and have been sold for distri-

CHINESE CHANGES

TONY RAYNS
charts the struggle
for a 'new wave' in Hong
Kong cinema — and
its echoes in Beijing
and Taipei.

bution in some western countries. But the dominant feeling that hangs over most films of the putative 'new wave' is one of entrapment. A new generation is making films, technical standards are much higher than they used to be, a new company is the market leader and the old genres are dead or dying fast . . . but there has been no radical 'break' with the cinema of the past, and the tyranny of the industry has not been challenged.

Given that circumstances could not have seemed more propitious for the emergence of a genuinely new cinema, it's necessary to ask where exactly the blockage has arisen. The following notes set out to analyse the small victories won by Hong Kong's young directors,

and the factors that have conspired to keep them at a more or less parochial level. Speculations along these lines soon have to take account of the fact that Hong Kong, despite its apparent cosmopolitanism, remains a deeply Chinese society; once this is perceived, it becomes apparent that the cultural problems are equally relevant to the other two centres of Chinese film production, the People's Republic and Taiwan.

First, some background. Hong Kong is one of the very few highly developed urban centres in which film-going is still a mass pastime. The territory (everyone avoids the term 'colony' these days) has two full-time tv stations, each with one

Allen Fong (left) directing *Father and Son*.



channel broadcasting in Cantonese and another in English; leisure options and cultural facilities have increased many-fold in the last decade; and yet people still go to the movies in large numbers. Furthermore, they almost always prefer local movies to western imports. In the 1980s, it is quite possible for a local hit to gross well over £2 million in the home market alone—this in a city with an official population of less than 5½ million, where seat-prices are still comparatively low.

This extraordinary level of prosperity conjures up an image of a stable and generously capitalised film industry—which could not be further from the truth. Hong Kong film history is a chapter of disasters, bankruptcies, sudden retirements and cut-throat rivalries. The important thing is that the public appetite for cinema has remained nearly constant. In the late 1970s, when the major companies were slow to respond to the shift in audience tastes, dozens of independent producers were ready to rush in to oblige. The last five years have seen the pendulum swing back the other way: floating capital has tended to disappear (sped on its way by worries about China's resumption of sovereignty in 1997), most of the independents have left the industry, and the majors are back on top. But the majors—there are now three, not including the 'leftist' companies—have acquired a new flexibility in their production policies, and the audiences are still coming.

Second, some history. Television has played a quite exceptional role in producing changes in the film industry over the years. Television helps to shape and define the cinema in most developed countries, of course, usually by appropriating subjects and audiences that would otherwise belong to the cinema and thereby forcing film-makers into other areas, sometimes (as in France) by failing to tackle certain areas and thereby leaving the field clear for the cinema. But the inter-relationship between cinema and television in Hong Kong has been unusually complex. To begin with,

broadcast television came to Hong Kong rather late, in 1967; there had previously been only a cable system, inaccessible to the vast majority living on government housing estates. The effective absence of television in the 1950s and 1960s gave rise to a 'compensatory' type of cinema: the literal mass-production of quickies in Cantonese, the dominant dialect of South China and hence of Hong Kong itself; 1,519 of these were made in the 1950s, and 1,547 in the 1960s. These films were, precisely, television before the event: formulaic, static, reassuringly similar from week to week and forever populated by the same faces. (This is not to say that they were without interest or, in some cases, lasting value.) Fittingly, these films have now become the 'roughage' in the diet of the tv stations, programmed at the rate of five or six a day in morning and late-late slots.

At the time, though, this 'proto-television' forced into being a higher tier in the film industry, an elite of directors and actors (most of them originally from the mainland) making bigger-budget films in Mandarin, China's national language. From 1960 onwards, these films were subtitled in Chinese for the benefit of non-Mandarin-speaking audiences; most of them, to this day, have not been sold to television. The arrival of broadcast television killed off the Cantonese branch of the film industry for some six years. Hong Kong cinema was almost wholly Mandarin-speaking in the late 1960s and early 70s and, as the rest of the world soon discovered, much of its output fell within the 'martial arts' genre. It was a cinema capable of great refinement and sophistication, but hardly any of its films dealt with the contemporary realities of Hong Kong. The directors, nearly all northerners or Shanghainese, simply disengaged themselves from their Cantonese milieu; their films tended to be nostalgic, studio-bound fantasies, predicated on an appeal to an idealised, imaginary 'China' that bore no real relation to any historical or political fact. It was consequently left to

television to construct images of Hong Kong itself, and the tv stations, starved of cinema films to bolster their schedules, had no choice but to provide them.

It was in the rapidly expanding tv industry of the mid-1970s that Hong Kong's aspiring young directors got their first breaks. Some had attended film schools in Europe or the USA; others had begun by making amateur films on Super-8 or by writing scripts and criticism. The Mandarin film industry, then dominated by Shaw Brothers, the new major, Golden Harvest, and several smaller companies with strong Taiwanese connections, was closed to them. The tv stations, on the other hand, were desperate for skilled new talent, and they proved amazingly adventurous in signing up untried directors and giving them their heads. At the time, there were three commercial stations, with five channels between them, competing fiercely for the services of new directors. A further option was (and still is) provided by the government-funded station RTHK, with no channel of its own but producing a wide range of programmes for regulated slots on the commercial channels.

It is no exaggeration to say that for a brief period—between 1976 and 1978—Hong Kong's tv production included some of the most formally and thematically innovative television in the world. This was largely thanks to the initiatives of two women: Selina Chow at TVB, the most prosperous of the commercial stations, and Cheung Man-Yee at RTHK. Both were production executives who allowed their young directors exceptional freedom. At TVB, for example, script-editors made no attempt to impose uniformity on filmed drama series like *Social Worker* and *C.I.D.*: an episode by Ann Hui might well be completely unlike the following week's episode by Alex Cheung or Yim Ho. TVB also found house-space for genuine mavericks like Patrick Tam and, later, Kirk Wong—and weathered the inevitable storms that broke when Tam, for instance, came

Allen Fong's *Ah Ying*.



Boat People.



up with an extraordinary variation on *Weekend*, complete with a respectful dedication to Godard. And at RTHK, nominally geared to produce a kind of velvet-glove propaganda for government policies, Ms Cheung allowed directors like Allen Fong, Ann Hui and Wong Sum to reverse the terms of their brief by making films about social, economic and political problems that were at least implicitly critical of the government's record.

There was no homogeneity about the work done by these young directors; on the contrary, they reacted against the limited canvas of the contemporary cinema by striking out in all the directions the cinema left untouched. At RTV, Johnny Mak pioneered the shooting (on film) of feature-length thrillers entirely on location, drawing on the forms and styles of current-affairs reportage. At CTv, Tsui Hark went to the other extreme on video, pushing studio stylisation to its limit in a mystical sword-play series called *The Gold Dagger Romance*. The only underlying common factor was that all of them saw their tv work as rehearsals or preparation for cinema. And when the first group made the transition to the film industry, there was no more sign of shared goals than before: Yim Ho made a slapstick comedy about a cretinous movie-extra, Ann Hui a psychological thriller, Tsui Hark an extravagant martial arts fantasy, Dennis Yu a gangster comedy, Alex Cheung a police thriller, and so on. Their departure left television seriously impoverished, and probably helped push the tv stations into production of the interminable drama serials that currently top the ratings and which are generally programmed in a strip format, five nights a week.

Third, the 'new wave' films themselves. Since it is necessary to be selective, I have chosen eight features and one feature-length tv film as examples, favouring titles that have already had some exposure outside Hong Kong. These sketches do not pretend to analyse

the films in the detail they deserve, but only to pinpoint elements relevant to the present discussion.

● *The Secret* (Fengjie, 1979). Ann Hui's debut feature offers a speculative solution to a real-life murder mystery: it starts from the discovery of two mutilated bodies and works through to the revelation that one of the bodies was wrongly identified at the autopsy. The choice of a semi-factual subject bespeaks a desire to be topical, and to restore images of Hong Kong itself to the cinema; as such, the film is in direct line with Hui's preceding tv work. But the treatment is aggressively 'cinematic'—not to say jaggedly westernised—bespeaking an even stronger desire to break away from the limitations of tv formats. The bizarre jump-cuts and the generally 'psychic' ambience evoke the work of Nicolas Roeg, a connection which also points to the film's principal subtext, its interest in the persistence of traditional superstitions in present-day Hong Kong. Aside from brief and startling glimpses of a hospital and a discotheque, *The Secret* withholds all images of modern Hong Kong; like Hui's subsequent *The Spooky Bunch*, it is a film about the past haunting the present.

● *Don't Play With Fire* (Diyi Leixing Weixian, 1980). Tsui Hark's third feature is framed as a minatory daydream about urban violence: three bored schoolboys commit an accidental murder, are blackmailed into further acts of delinquency by a psychotic young woman and end up running foul of a gang of vicious American arms smugglers. Part masterly *film noir*, part jet-black comedy, part 'splatter' exploitation movie, the film's resolutely non-realistic approach camouflages a determination to deal with (exacerbate?) the social and political tensions felt by many working-class Chinese in Hong Kong. The camouflage was insufficient to satisfy the government film censor, who insisted that Tsui reshoot substantial parts of the film, to alter character motivations and add a conspicuous police presence to

CHINESE CHANGES

the plot. The reshot version softens the original's truly anarchic vision of a complete breakdown of social responsibility, but it also allows Tsui to underline his hatred of the non-Chinese characters.

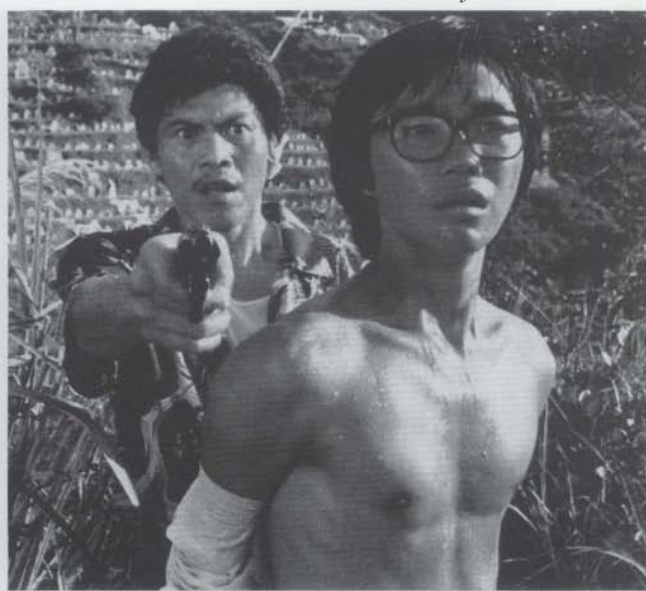
● *King Chau and Lady Yu* (Ba Wang Bie Ji, 1981). Alex Law's tv film was made in two parts for the RTHK series *Faces and Places*; it traces the lives of two Peking Opera actors from their first meeting as children at an opera school in North China in the 1910s to their final, bleak reunion in present-day Hong Kong. Imaginatively scripted as a chronicle of a crypto-homosexual 'marriage' and brilliantly directed and acted, it offers an acutely pessimistic reading of 20th century Chinese history and an alienated view of a contemporary Hong Kong as strange and desolate as a lunar landscape. All this adds up to one of the first serious (if necessarily oblique) meditations on the '1997 question' in Hong Kong film-making. It could not have been made for the cinema.

● *Nomad* (Liehuo Qingchun, 1982). Patrick Tam has disowned this, his third feature, because of producer and censor interference (the latter in response to a campaign against the film mounted by a coalition of eighteen 'moral' pressure-groups), but it stands as a fundamentally honourable attempt to

King Chau and Lady Yu.



Don't Play With Fire.



deal with two aspects of Hong Kong's current generation of adolescents: their confused sexuality and their fascination with Japan and Japanese culture. The film is deliberately provocative in staging some of its sex scenes in public places (a shopping mall, a late-night tram) and in emphasising its characters' dreams of 'escaping' from Hong Kong. Its relentless aestheticism brackets it as an 'art movie'.

● *Boat People* (Touben Nuhai, 1982). Ann Hui's fourth feature, a panoramic account of the Communist takeover of South Vietnam seen through the eyes of a Japanese photo-journalist, indirectly derives from two of her tv films for the series *Below the Lion Rock: Boy From Vietnam* (Lai Ke, 1978), a pessimistic study of the plight of Vietnamese refugees in Hong Kong, and *The Bridge* (Qiao, 1978), which shows a western journalist's growing involvement with a squatter protest movement and ends with his expulsion from Hong Kong by the government. Western critics have tended to see the film as a lurid exposé of Communist brutalities and hypocrisies. Hong Kong audiences, less naively, took it as a troubled commentary on the tensions within China's Communist Party—and, consequently, on their own prospective future after 1997.

● *Ah' Ying* (Banbianren, 1983). Allen Fong was the first of the young directors to sign with a 'leftist' company, which allowed him to make features in the same realistic vein as his tv work. He works on location, with non-professional actors, using direct sound; *Ah Ying* (his second feature) is largely based on the life of its 22-year-old lead actress, to the extent that her real-life family play themselves, re-enacting their domestic squabbles in their own cramped apartment. But Fong is not interested in 'docu-drama': as in *Father and Son*, he uses his characters' experiences as cyphers for the feelings, dreams and contradictions of Hong Kong. The film also contains an acid portrait of a 'leftist' film company refusing to provide finance

for what it considers an uncommercial project.

● *Hong Kong, Hong Kong* (Nan yu Nü, 1983). Produced by Shaw Brothers, and evidence of the company's rather desperate wish to regain ground lost to independent producers, this was Clifford Choi's fourth feature. As the English title suggests, it self-consciously sees Hong Kong as a meeting-place for transients and, with heavy irony, as an arena for dreams of success. The principals are a Thai-Chinese window-cleaner, who aspires to win a boxing tournament, and a woman, an illegal immigrant from the mainland, who fends off the threat of repatriation by turning to prostitution. The film doesn't begin to reconcile its elements of sociology with its embarrassed attitude to sex or its scenes of shrieking melodrama, but it is none the less fascinating as an attempt at a critical study of the city and its prospects.

● *Health Warning* (Da Leitai, 1983). Kirk Wong's second feature is an all-out fantasy, an anti-fascist fable with generic roots in old kung-fu movies. Set in a devastated city of the future, it imagines a low-tech battle between Lords of Misrule and some rather stolid upholders of tradition. There is an unsettling discrepancy between the matter and the manner of its telling, rather as if J.-J. Beineix had directed *Mad Max 2*: much of the film is mounted in exquisitely lit and choreographed sequence-shots. It is notable also for its black humour, groundbreaking emphasis on perverse sexuality... and complete disengagement from the immediate realities of Hong Kong.

● *An Amorous Woman of the Tang Dynasty* (Tangchao Haofang Nu, 1984). Another innovation for Shaw Brothers: a film subcontracted to an independent project-development company called Overground Films, run by the well-established scriptwriter Qiu Gangjian and the young director Eddie Fong. Fong's debut feature is a resolutely

modernist 'period' film, a stylised account of a woman's sexual and social emancipation that has no truck with notions of historical accuracy. Its terms of reference are derived from recent Japanese cinema (Oshima, Shinoda) and from up-to-date western readings of sexual politics; there are strong elements of male and female homosexuality. Behind the way that it distances itself from Chinese traditions lies an unmistakable air of defiance.

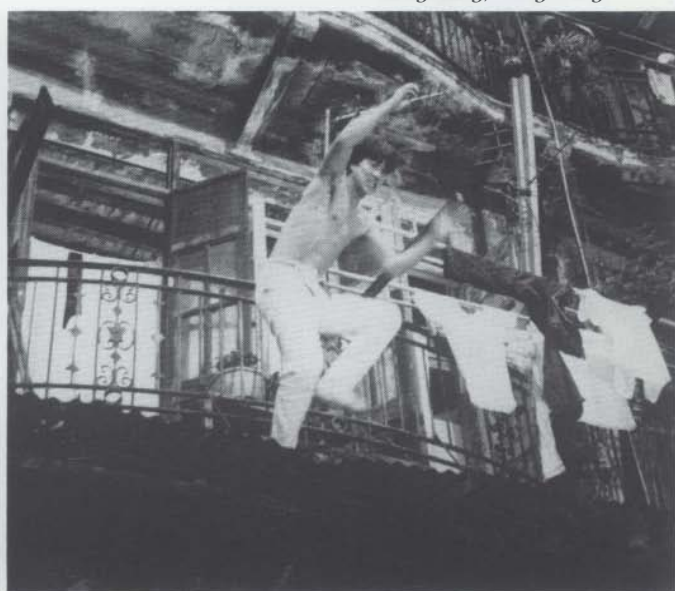
Fourth, some tentative observations about the lessons to be drawn from these examples. It is clear that Hong Kong's young film-makers are caught in a vicious circle, hemmed around by a monolithic and ruthless industry, an inflexible and highly restrictive system of censorship and a mass audience with a pronounced taste for the most conservative forms of escapism. The industry's vertical integration of production, distribution and exhibition leaves no space for outsiders and misfits, and so film-makers have no options but to capitulate to the system or to remain silent. Allen Fong is the exception that proves this rule, and even he (as the film company scenes in *Ah Ying* suggest) has encountered difficulties with his supposedly enlightened 'leftist' employers. The last remaining haven for independent-minded film-making is the tv station RTHK; and there, too, restrictions are tightening as the authorities become more sensitive to political undercurrents in the work they produce; Alex Law's *King Chau and Lady Yu* is now banned from further screenings, for example. This vicious circle accounts for the sense of entrapment found in so many of the 'new wave' films: a radical film-maker hoping to reach a potentially responsive audience would have to run the gauntlet of both the industry's conservatism and the government's censorship before even reaching the starting-line.

The sense of entrapment takes several forms. In films like *The Secret, Don't Play With Fire* and *Health Warning*, it's a matter of the film-maker straining

Health Warning.



Hong Kong, Hong Kong.



CHINESE CHANGES

against genre conventions but never quite managing to break free of them. In films like *Nomad* and *An Amorous Woman of the Tang Dynasty*, it's more a matter of the film-maker being driven into a rather precious visual stylisation in order to dress up an essentially naked interest in questions of sex and identity. Most of all, though, it's perceptible as a kind of sullen resentment that it is always necessary to dissemble, to discuss issues obliquely, to resort to metaphor or allegory or fable.

The only film-maker who has negotiated these reefs with consistent success is Ann Hui, who lost all her censorship battles in television in the years before she started making films. Her films raise interesting and sometimes urgent questions quite directly, but she skilfully displaces them to settings outside the mainstream of Hong Kong society: a forgotten suburb in *The Secret*, an outlying island in *The Spooky Bunch*, Manila's Chinatown in *The Story of Woo Viet*, Vietnam in *Boat People*. This strategy has allowed her to circumvent censorship while remaining in close touch with her local audience. It allowed *Boat People* to be the only Hong Kong film to confront the implications of 1997 with a kind of directness, and the audience responded by making it far and away the most successful of the films outlined above.

Ann Hui directing *Boat People*.



In the success of *Boat People* lies a clue to the final and most debilitating trap that awaits Hong Kong's directors. It is their obligation to address their films specifically to a Hong Kong audience. That is, a *Chinese* audience weighed down with vestiges of Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoist superstitions, predominantly anti-Communist but still fiercely nationalistic, at least superficially puritanical, generally suspicious of western influences and almost uniformly determined not to rock the Hong Kong boat. When Tsui Hark tried to open up the cracks in Hong Kong society in *Don't Play With Fire*, his film flopped. When Patrick Tam tried to be frank about adolescent attitudes in *Nomad*, his film was buried under an avalanche of protests. When Kirk Wong and Eddie Fong tried to inscribe a broader and less complacent audience into *Health Warning* and *An Amorous Woman*, their films, too, flopped. The only director comfortable with the seeming limitation of the Hong Kong audience is Allen Fong, who busies himself telling the stories that the other directors of his generation have neglected or dismissed as unimportant. The importance of his films is precisely that they demonstrate that 'local' need not mean 'parochial'.

Fifth and last, some echoes. Some day a general history of Chinese cinema will be written, recognising that the Shanghai film industry of the 1930s was ancestor to both the Communist cinema of the People's Republic and the capitalist cinemas of Hong Kong and Taiwan, and that the correspondences between these separate strands of Chinese film-making have sometimes been greater than anyone could have predicted. Until then, they will continue to appear disconnected. But the correspondences exist...

The beginnings of a 'new wave' appeared in the Taiwan film industry a couple of years ago, inspired by the Hong Kong example and sustained by broadly comparable conditions (a generation of a similar age feeling similar dissatisfac-

tion with the political and cultural status quo). It was ushered in by the government-run Central Motion Picture Corporation, whose senior producer, Ming Ji, hit on the idea of using portmanteau films to give several young directors at once their first breaks. Thus *In Our Time* (*Guangyin de Gushi*, 1982) introduced four new directors, and *The Sandwich Man* (*Erzi de Da Wan'ou*, 1983) three more. Like their Hong Kong counterparts, they had mostly studied at film schools abroad and come home to find work in television. These films were designed not only to bring new blood into an industry that sorely needed it, but also to attract the young audience that had all but given up on local cinema. They succeeded in both aims, but *The Sandwich Man* did considerably more than that: its overt pessimism about the state of Taiwanese society and its explicit anti-Americanism unleashed a major controversy about censorship and freedom of expression, which cost Ming Ji his job. None the less, all seven of the young directors were soon making features in their own right.

Their work has much the same strengths and weaknesses as that of their Hong Kong contemporaries. They have brought fresh images of Taiwanese realities to the screen; they have explored their own generation's mixed feelings about coming of age in Taiwanese society; and they have introduced formal innovations and higher technical standards. But films like Edward Yang's *That Day on the Beach* (*Haitan de Yitian*, 1983) and Hou Xiaoxian's *All the Youthful Days* (*Fenggui Lai de Ren*, 1983) are, in a sense, prisoners of their own formal brilliance. Their film language—Yang's mastery of a very complex flashback structure, Hou's virtuoso use of sequence-shots that make great play with off-screen space—is so extremely different from the norms of Taiwanese cinema that it can only be read as a desperate attempt to break free from the past. Whereas their subjects—a woman rallying from a failed marriage, country

Edward Yang shooting *That Day on the Beach*.





The Sandwich Man.

boys trying to settle in the city—are nothing if not introverted, domestic and local. The seismic gap between the one impulse to deal with immediate realities and the other to reach for the skies will be familiar to anyone who has seen *The Secret*, *Nomad* or *Health Warning*.

China has recently begun sending

students to overseas film schools like the Centro Sperimentale in Rome, but (unlike Hong Kong and Taiwan) it has an excellent film school of its own. The Beijing Film Academy is temporarily housed in a former agricultural college several miles north of the capital; the rural ambience is deceptively sleepy. I

was lucky enough to visit it last year, and the staff and students proudly showed me an example of their work.

It was a one-hour film called *We Are Still Young* (*Women Hai Nianqing*), recently completed by Xia Gang, Gen Xiaozhen and Wang Yiqin, students from the directing class taught by Zheng Dongtian. Almost plotless, it describes the lives of three young men who share a room and also work in the same factory. A young woman comes to the factory with a reputation for loose morals from her previous job; one of the boys befriends her and eventually marries her. The film is directed, scripted and acted with an assurance not found in too many of China's professional feature films at present, which is impressive enough in itself. But what I found almost overwhelmingly moving about it was its flawless reinvention of a naturalistic idiom that has been missing from mainland cinema for several decades: at last Chinese film-makers are finding ways to represent Chinese realities. Images from the film have stayed with me. If there's ever a 'new wave' in mainland cinema, then this will be the generation that breaks it. ■

Original film titles are standardised in their Mandarin form. Names of individuals are given in Mandarin or Cantonese, according to the usage of the person concerned. Grateful thanks to Shu Kei, Edward Yang, Chen Kuo-Fu and Zheng Dongtian for essential help in preparing this essay.

T.R.



MTM 'Quality Television'

Edited by Jane Feuer, Paul Kerr & Tise Vahimagi

MTM can lay claim to being the most innovative company in American television. Its initial success was based on *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* from the star of which the company draws its name, but MTM branched out into the production of award-winning drama series such as *Lou Grant* and *Hill Street Blues*. This book contains a detailed history of the company to date together with full credit lists.

£18.00 hardback £8.95 paperback

CINEMA AND STATE: The Film Industry and the British Government 1927-84

By Margaret Dickinson & Sarah Street

Cinema and State is a history of government intervention in the British film industry. Drawing on new research, the authors trace the tortuous but often fascinating story of the role played by the State in the affairs of Wardour Street.

£18.00 hardback £8.95 paperback

Available from good bookshops or the Publications Department, British Film Institute, 81 Dean Street, London W1V 6AA. Please add 75p per book postage and packing.

CHINA'S SCREEN

A profusely illustrated journal focusing on the Chinese motion-picture industry. Includes profiles of producers, directors and actors as well as synopses of new films and news of film production, festivals etc.

PUBLISHED FOUR TIMES A YEAR

PRICE £2.60 PER ANNUM

Please send payment with order to:

Collets

SUBSCRIPTION IMPORT DEPARTMENT

Denington Estate, Wellingborough

Northants NN8 2QT. Telephone: [0933] 224351

OUR FULL 1985 CATALOGUE OF CHINESE PERIODICALS IS AVAILABLE NOW

EAST MEETS WEST **at the** **National Film Theatre**



MORE ELECTRIC SHADOWS

January/February 1985

The first 'Electric Shadows' season at the NFT, in 1980, demolished dozens of prejudices about China's movies and revealed a cinema as rich, varied and accomplished as any in the world. This is the long-awaited sequel: a lavish selection of comedies, thrillers, spectacles and melodramas, spanning 60 years of change and development in the world's most populous country. Delights and discoveries are guaranteed!

PANDORA'S BOX—A GERMAN PANORAMA

Part I — Drama and Decor in the Twenties

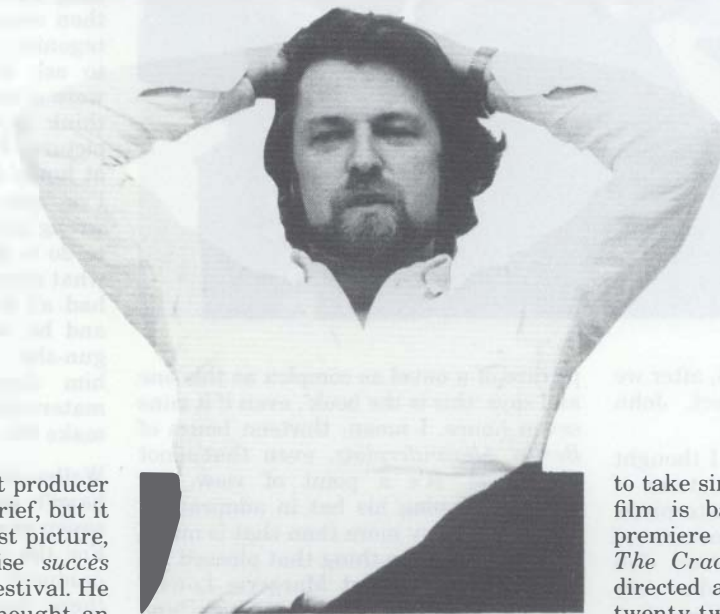
January/February 1985

Expressionism, realism, grandiose historical spectacle, low-life melodrama, ghost stories, mountain films... the treasures of early German film from THE CABINET OF DR CALIGARI to Pola Negri in THE MOUNTAIN CAT to FAUST (and not forgetting Marlene Dietrich in a pre-BLUE ANGEL role) all screening at the NFT.

Membership from 70p weekly. Tickets: £2.40

**Available from Box Office 928 3232
National Film Theatre, South Bank, London SE1 8XT**

O'Connor, Lowry, Huston and Welles



Michael Fitzgerald talks to Richard Trainor

The film career of independent producer Michael Fitzgerald has been brief, but it has so far been stellar. His first picture, *Wise Blood*, was the surprise *succès d'estime* at the 1979 Cannes Festival. He next attempted what many thought an impossibility, a film of Malcolm Lowry's novel *Under the Volcano*. Again working with director John Huston, Fitzgerald brought the picture in under schedule and under budget; and although it did not receive the critical praise which greeted *Wise Blood*, it has had its share of honours and has done far better at the box-office. Fitzgerald is an admitted outsider who, when not on location or in Hollywood, enjoys the life of a gentleman farmer at his home in South Conway, New Hampshire. He has a singular background for a Hollywood producer: he was educated at University College Dublin and at Harvard and

then taught Chinese history in Rome.

Fitzgerald recently began work on his third picture, *Rocking the Cradle*, which marks the directorial return of Orson Welles. It is a gamble that no other Hollywood producer has been prepared

to take since *Touch of Evil* in 1958. The film is based on the 1937 Broadway premiere of Marc Blitzstein's operetta *The Cradle Will Rock*, which Welles directed and co-produced when he was twenty-two. This caustic political satire was originally to have been staged by the New Deal-financed Liberty Theatre, but the government sponsors, fearing a Congressional backlash, withdrew at the last minute. When Welles arrived at the theatre, it was padlocked and guarded. While his colleagues sought another theatre, Welles entertained the first-night crowd with magic routines from a flatbed truck. Later, Welles led a twenty-block march up Broadway to the Venice Theatre, where the play went on. Fitzgerald talked about this and other topics at his office on the Universal lot between multilingual phone calls to Monaco, Italy and Mexico. R.T.

RICHARD TRAINOR: Why did you become a film producer?

MICHAEL FITZGERALD: Frustration. I started out in Italy helping a friend write a script. He was a wonderful old guy named Harry Craig. Though nothing came of it, I decided in 1976 to give up my teaching job in Rome; I enlisted my brother Ben to come out here to Los Angeles and for a year we lived in Venice, California, madly writing screenplays. We were horribly unsuccessful, and that's when I decided to try producing films, since nobody else seemed to want to make the kind of pictures that interested me. The one I really wanted to see done was a novel by Flannery O'Connor, *Wise Blood*. So, I set out to do that.

How did you persuade John Huston to direct *Wise Blood*?

I happened to get hold of his number in

Mexico and called to ask if he might be interested in directing the film. My idea was that if I could get the money to do the picture, Huston could balance out my total lack of experience. He asked for a copy of the book, and then a few days later invited me to his home in Puerta Vallarta. For the first three days I was totally tongue-tied. John was terribly pleasant and supportive, but he told me right away that the chances of ever getting this done were remote. And I said, well, it's worth a try. So having painted myself into a corner, I set out to try to find the money to produce the film. The sheer naivety of some of the things I did makes me shiver with shame,

Eventually, I scraped together enough money to make the picture, in all less than a million dollars. We put together a team, which included John's long-time associate Tom Shaw as production

supervisor, and my wife who did the sets and costumes for a budget which I think was some ridiculous figure like \$578, and went down to Macon where we took over the Macon Hilton. We made the picture in a little less than seven weeks, which was very under schedule. Then we took it to Cannes, where it was a huge success, maybe the great critical success of John's life. It had no bad reviews, which was something unique. John said it would never happen again... Of course, I couldn't sell it to anybody. Everyone was terrified of the story and felt that it was the least commercial movie ever made.

After *Wise Blood*, the question was what to do next? John and I tried to do a love story, which we planned to shoot in Switzerland. We spent a year writing script after script, and we brought in other screenwriters, but we just couldn't



Brad Dourif in *Wise Blood*.

quite get it right. Then in 1983, after we had given up on that project, John suggested *Under the Volcano*.

I had read the novel, which I thought was quite good, although I'm not one of those who consider it a masterpiece. John and I had thought for a moment of doing it right after *Wise Blood*. We talked to Richard Burton, who very much wanted to play the Consul. I admired the prospect of making a picture of the novel more than I admired the novel. But at that time I wanted to make a picture that was fairly simple, not realising then that there is nothing simple—it doesn't exist. But I felt that having made this extraordinary, esoteric—which, by the way, is not all that esoteric—picture, *Wise Blood*, I wanted to try something simpler. To go from *Wise Blood* to *Under the Volcano*...? I thought, hell, I'd go back to Italy and study painting and sculpture.

This came out of my frustration at being unable to sell *Wise Blood*. You have no idea what I tried to do to sell it. I couldn't get anyone to buy it, to distribute it, nobody had the guts. If the picture had been properly distributed, it could have made a lot of money, no doubt about it, because it had been such a huge success at Cannes. Of course, I did eventually sell it, but it was one of those atrocious deals where no matter what happened you would never earn a cent. I took everything that happened on that film personally. With *Under the Volcano*, I don't have the same proprietary feelings.

When you were making *Under the Volcano*, were you concerned that you'd be attacked by the novel's cult following for having taken liberties with it?

No matter what film you make of something like *Under the Volcano*, they are going to come after you. It was a picture that could have been made in a hundred different ways, and nobody makes a

picture of a novel as complex as this one and says 'this is the book', even if it runs seven hours. I mean, thirteen hours of *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, even that's not the novel. It's a point of view, it's someone tipping his hat in admiration. To see it as any more than that is out of the question. One thing that pleased me enormously was that Margerie Lowry, Malcolm's widow, saw the picture and thought it was marvellous, and nobody knows that novel better. When I think of some of the rather fanciful things people see in novels and films and then read their criticisms, I'm reminded of the greatest letter to a critic. Nabokov wrote it to the author of a book called *Nabokov's Symbols*: 'The present article is not to respond to a critic but to ask him to remove his belongings.' I'm not interested in theories about the novel. What interested us was making a story that's the tragedy of a man's life.

What do you look for in a screenplay adaptation of a novel?

There's no doubt about the story in *Wise Blood*; the dramatic line shines through very clearly. If the line isn't there you shouldn't make the movie. And with something like *Under the Volcano*, you have to go for a central theme and a central dramatic line and carry it forward so that you are hurtling forward and it becomes unstoppable. I think John is as good at that as anyone making pictures today, if not better. 'Every scene can have only one mood. Every scene can say only one thing.' John said that some thirty years ago. He is very much a man who wants to make things clear—which is not a matter of simplifying, but rather of saying only one thing at a time. Almost all great dramatists are only saying one thing at a time.

Why do you want to make a film about the opening night of *The Cradle Will Rock*?

About three years ago, Alex North, who

did the music for both *Wise Blood* and *Under the Volcano*, played me a recording that Marc Blitzstein made about the events surrounding *The Cradle Will Rock*. It only lasted five or ten minutes, but it seemed such a great story that I felt I had to make a film about it. It's a fine operetta, though fairly dated. But the part we will be using is wonderful and savagely satirical.

I was waiting for the right time to do it, and that occurred just as we were finishing *Under the Volcano*. I asked Ring Lardner Jr to write a script and then sought out Orson Welles, the protagonist of that opening night incident, to ask his advice. Orson's comments were so marvellous that I then began to think about asking him to direct the picture. We were discussing the project at lunch one day, and I said, 'I'm sorry, I've approached you on entirely the wrong premise. What I'd really like you to do is direct the film.' He was somewhat surprised. As you know, Orson has had all kinds of problems with studios and he was understandably somewhat gun-shy. People have been promising him things for years which never materialised, but I told him that I *would* make the picture. So he agreed to do it.

Welles hasn't made a picture that he hasn't produced himself in twenty-seven years. Why?

For the same reason that I became a producer rather than a screenwriter. If there has been any blackballing involved, it has probably been through ignorance. There's a generation of people who run the movie business now, many of them not much older than I am, who know nothing about Mr Welles, as of course they know nothing about Mr Huston. They rely on what they have heard, and Orson does have this reputation for going over budget and for not having the capacity to finish things. If one cares to look at his record, that's nonsense. First of all, he was nearly always spending his own money, which none of these people would dream of doing because they are not lovers of film, or knowledgeable about film. They are deal-makers and people who are only interested in their own salaries and their own future. Orson is probably the only great director in cinema who has consistently had to invest his own money—all his own money—and has had to do the most humiliating things just to begin making his films. When he has gone over budget or been unable to finish a picture, it was because his budget was \$250,000 and he needed another \$50,000 to finish something. Which he could never get.

People have wasted more money on one movie than Orson has spent in his entire career. I don't think the totality of Orson's budgets since 1941 has exceeded \$10 million. But whenever there was an adequate budget—and I don't mean an extravagant one—there hasn't been any problem. Like John Huston, Orson is one of the least expensive directors around. They both *know* what they are doing. The picture we are making is a very

modest one in terms of the cost. I don't want to say exactly what the budget is because there are people who might be interested in the video cassette rights, and if I say exactly how much we are going to spend they will then pare down their offer. That isn't fair: they should be paying what it's worth to them.

I assume that on this picture, unlike most of his others, Welles will have final cut.

Absolutely. What is the point of getting somebody like John Huston or Orson Welles if you're not going to let them cut the picture? Who's to cut it if not them? Some idiot accountant who was a coffee boy four years ago? Certainly not me.

I am not worried by the stories of Welles going over budget. I rely on what I see before me and the facts of the matter; and the fact of the matter is that, of all my concerns, *that* is the least. If there's a common interest, there's no reason to be concerned: we're all in the same boat, no one is putting anything over on anyone else. It's really that simple. In Hollywood people spend four times as much as they should, people are paid four times too much, and on top of that people steal and waste. So budgets go up and up.

You've made two pictures from what were considered unfilmable properties. Do you enjoy going against the grain?

I guess I do, though it's not consciously going against the grain. I've found that whatever small niche I might or might not have comes from not trying to do what everyone else is doing, but finding something really good that nobody else is doing. It seems to be easier for me to do this because I don't have much competition.

What do you think engenders the so-called 'blockbuster mentality' and how, if at all, has it affected you?

I think what causes it is the never-ending spiral of escalating wages for some of the actors. People getting a million dollars for five minutes of screen time, and able to command it because of the number of people that *their* presence attracts. I don't think any actor deserves four million dollars for a picture. Or six million dollars plus thirty per cent of the gross. This is a situation in which you just cannot win. It hurts everybody, and if there weren't anti-trust laws, I believe the studios would get together to stop it. They initiated the system which is now out of hand. I don't blame the managers and executives. I blame the Frankensteins which have been created, the people who *must* get paid extravagant amounts of money so that you *must* make films that cater to the lowest common denominator if you are going to stay in business.

It's funny. I go to agents and I find that I can hardly breathe when I have to say, 'OK, \$200,000.' The outrage almost makes me ill. Then the agent comes back and says, 'You're absolutely out of your



Albert Finney in *Under the Volcano*.

mind, you're too low.' There's really no measure any longer relevant to the reality of the world. I think there should be, and there has been on pictures that I've put together. But I also find, strangely enough, that there is a great deal of sympathy for pictures that are good, and that people will work for what are reasonable—and in the real world, extravagant—sums of money.

How has your success affected your relationships with studios, distributors and potential backers?

It has only changed one way: instead of me going to them, they are now coming to me. They're also more comfortable, which is understandable. If you are coming to them cold, as I was doing before *Wise Blood*, they don't have that confidence—and why should they? I still call people and don't get my telephone calls returned . . . very frequently. But then, if I did become terribly successful, perhaps it would be me not returning the calls, and I wouldn't like that either. The whole thing is really a game some of the time. If you get the chance to do something really good, the end game makes the whole play worth acting in.

Which other directors would you like to work with?

Ettore Scola. I think he's a great director. I'd like to make a picture with Eric Rohmer. I'd also like to make a picture with Billy Wilder and with Werner Herzog. And Jack Clayton, who has not worked in some time.

What have you in mind after *Rocking the Cradle*?

I intend to do a film of *Revolt of the Angels*, based on the novel by Anatole France. Jean-Claude Carrière is scripting it, and we will shoot it in France. At one time, John Huston and I were talking about doing *The Autumn of the Patriarch*, but now I'm not so sure. It's such a huge thing and I don't know if John could handle it—not that he

couldn't do it, but I'm afraid that an extended location shoot might be too great a physical imposition on him. I'd rather see John alive than killing himself on an enormous project like that. We are, however, considering a film of Steinbeck's *In Dubious Battle*.

My own obsession for years has been to make a film that I can't even get the rights to, because they are owned by Paramount, and Paramount isn't doing anything with it. It's a novel that I think is maybe the single most perfect gem of the language, Edith Wharton's *Ethan Frome*. I know how to do it, and if Paramount does not make it within a year, after which their rights run out, I am going to make it.

You have to be successful and powerful in this town to make pictures. I wish that I were in a position to duck the marketing end, but I'm not, and therefore I have to devote an enormous amount of time to it. I see salesmen going about making deals, and I think I'm totally out of my range . . . I can't bring to the surface the sort of wild enthusiasm it seems to take, which is just hype. I just can't seem to bring it up; it doesn't *come* from anywhere. I'm just trying to make a movie every once in a while and I can't do that whole mad act, though if I did have that kind of talent it would probably make things much, much easier.

I know how to get people's interest in a project—I mean actors and directors—and maybe how to inspire people to do things in conditions that they would not normally contemplate—but that's only because I'm working in the same conditions and because of a common purpose. But I'm not a salesman . . . I love to see it, though; it's like going to Las Vegas for me, it dazzles me. What people who have absolutely nothing to contribute to the real world can do and how they can tower above everybody in this industry is simply amazing. I'm not that kind of a winner. ■

The Distinguished Thingumabob

Well, well, as Henry James is supposed to have said with his dying breath, here it is at last, the distinguished thing. I should make it clear, however, that the distinguished thing which concerns me is not Death (touch wood) but British Film Year, first announced at the 1984 Cannes Festival, officially launched in London a few months back and due to get under way this coming March. Its brief would seem to be less that of promoting the British cinema *per se* than of augmenting the number of paying customers on the domestic front (by a mere 4 per cent, a nevertheless ambitious target) for whatever fare, local, American or 'foreign'. Incontrovertibly a good idea, then, even though its slogan's claim—'Cinema—the Best Place to See a Film'—is an untenable one these days. (With the exception of mismatched screen formats, I am firmly, heretically, convinced that the best place to see a film is in the privacy of one's own home, sans supporting programmes, sans ice-cream salesgirls, sans the privilege of hearing a neighbouring spectator prise open a box of chocolates and being assailed by a graphic mental image of the inside of his mouth, a humid coffee cream obscenely enthroned upon his tongue like a minute, plump, well-oiled eunuch on a red velure rug—sans, in short, any distraction.)

And yet... Why is it that, intermittently fond of the British cinema as I have been over the years, I cannot help gagging on the attendant hype? Perhaps it is, as with this latest 'Renaissance', that the publicity is always contingent on a notion of patriotism, so that everything is whipped up together into a peculiarly unholy mix, Falklands and *Chariots*, Diana and Koo, Randy Andy and *Gandhi*. Consider: A film, *Chariots of Fire*, wins a fistful of Oscars, and we are subjected to the spectacle of Colin Welland brandishing his statuette as though it were a blunderbuss and issuing a threat the like of which had not been heard in the colonies since the War of Independence—'The British are coming!' (When you think of it, the film's ascension to Oscar-dom constituted in itself a genuine *Chariots of Fire*-type success story, and you can easily visualise how Hugh Hudson might have shot it, with Welland and David Puttnam gracefully straining in slow motion towards the Academy podium to the catchy refrain of a theme tune by Vangelis...) Or: A director, Lindsay Anderson, who once (as a contributor to SIGHT AND SOUND aeons ago) shrewdly compared the chore of reviewing British films with doing one's National Service, now sounds (or sounds off) like some irascible, puce-complexioned colonel (rtd.) out of



British Film Year press conference: David Puttnam.

Cheltenham demanding the return of that same National Service for the younger generation of critics.

What *has* such jingoist swagger to do with the cinema? Why am I already persuaded that British Film Year will be, like the above-mentioned Renaissance (and, indeed, like the film which lent this expression its revived notoriety), a ploughman's lunch, an adman's hunch? On reflection, I still believe that the wisest crack ever made about our national product was Truffaut's, when he suggested that there might be 'a certain incompatibility between the terms "cinema" and "Britain".' For what every film shot in this country has in common is an indelible humdrum Britishness, one compounded of, *inter alia*, class rigidities, physical traits, a predominantly literary culture and, not least, a factor cited by Stephen Frears apropos filming thrillers, to wit, the funny shape of policemen's helmets. And if I were to coin a motto for British film history—a *device*, in the heraldic sense—it would be 'And yet...'

Hitchcock? And yet his Hollywood movies were so incomparably richer. Powell? And yet it is eccentricity (which is what he and Pressburger traded in) rather than normality that is the enemy of the truly strange. Thorold Dickinson? And yet he was a textbook Eisenstein, a textbook Welles (never mind that his career actually predated the latter's). The documentarists? And yet how offensive was their idea of dignifying the trodden-on masses by positioning them against dark lowering skies (a trick they picked up from that old aesthete Flaherty—in the cinema, aestheticism is invariably related to the horizon). Jennings? And yet his lyrical alleluias to all things British make his films difficult of access to those shadowy, faceless unfortunates born outside of the royal throne of kings, sceptred isle, and so on.

Korda? And yet his world view is encompassed by E. C. Bentley's clerihew:

The Art of Biography
Is different from Geography.
Geography is about Maps,
But Biography is about Chaps.

That there might have been more to our colonial history than a few Chaps (with Pipes) pointing at Maps appears never to have occurred to him or to his scenarists. (Flora Robson's feisty Elizabeth I in *Fire Over England* was what you might call an honorary Chap, while Paul Robeson's Bosambo, the tribal chief in *Sanders of the River*, was just part of the Map.)

Little has changed. Despite the triumph of *The Draughtsman's Contract*, Peter Greenaway struggles to finance a new feature; Bill Forsyth becomes ever more 'Czech', gradually transforming himself into a homegrown Jiri Menzel, which is all we need; Kevin Brownlow may simply have lost heart. To my mind, the one currently employed British director of international class—and, significantly, one who has actually succeeded in confronting that bedrock Britishness and appropriating it as a theme—is Mike Leigh. The snag is that critics heretofore—even those sympathetic to him—have tended to stub their toes on his gift for near-hallucinatory naturalism, as though it were the last, not the first, word on his work. Yet, beneath that admittedly overwhelming surface mimicry, his kinship is rather with such austere mandarins as Bresson, Rossellini and Dreyer, i.e. he is a director of *miracles*. Those in Leigh's films are all the more authentic for being almost intangible: the mutual commiseration offered by two frustrated women in *Grown-Ups* or the unforeseen delicacy with which a teenager caresses the raw, brand new baldness of his skinhead brother at the end of *Meantime*. And, in view of his abiding preoccupation with the family



Mike Leigh's *Four Days in July*: Desmond McAleer, Brid Brennan.

unit, he just conceivably might be considered, *toutes proportions gardées*, the British Ozu.

The incompatibility of which Truffaut spoke can therefore be turned to advantage; there need be no outright fatalism as regards the capacity of British films to rise above the second-rate; and, yes, I genuinely hope that, beside the hype, something of enduring value will survive this forthcoming British Film Year. And yet...

All About Liane

So concerned were my predecessors on this column to preserve their anonymity that they adopted pseudonyms which were themselves, for many of us, almost as mysterious as the identities they concealed. Not 'Quincannon', perhaps, who kicked off, for that ought to be an evocative name to anyone familiar with Ford's cavalry movies—but 'Almereida' and 'The Dikler', for heaven's sake? I assume I shall not betray any trust if I now reveal, for those as perplexed as I used to be, that the first was the alias of Jean Vigo's anarchist father and the second, I am told, a racehorse of some distinction. My excuse for performing such a service is that I have resolved to come clean at the very outset of my own tenure: so Heurtebise, you should know, was one of the most illustrious and versatile angels in Cocteau's cosmogony, primarily as the ambiguous hero of a long, incantatory poem, 'L'Ange Heurtebise', then as the protocol-minded aide-de-camp (played by François Périer) of the Princesse (Maria Casarès) in the films *Orphée* and *Le Testament d'Orphée*. Typically, the choice of such a memorable appellation was not the product of any surrealistically 'automatic' mental

process. Cunniff Cocteau spotted the word on a plaque while ascending in a lift: it was the manufacturer's name.

Speaking of Cocteau, I lately chanced to read a little-known play of his, *Les Monstres Sacrés*, which had its premiere in 1940. In fact, he referred to it rather as 'the portrait of a play': he set it in a theatrical milieu and insisted that both costumes and sets, like his own dialogue, remain deliberately undated, in order that the public might 'have the illusion of the play unfolding in an untropical present tense, which is to say, in a special period from which the war has been excluded.' It is a fairly minor do, as the author himself was the first (though certainly not the last) to admit; and I only mention it here for its strangely suggestive plot. When the curtain rises, Esther, a *prima donna assoluta* in the florid Sarah Bernhardt manner, is changing behind a screen in her dressing-room and haranguing her dresser Loulou on the mishaps of the evening's performance. (Unknown to her, however, Loulou has not yet arrived, which turns this opening scene into a monologue.) Following a series of mildly amusing exchanges between them, enter Liane—'very modern, very photogenic in a trenchcoat', as Cocteau describes her—who, fervently yet somehow obsequiously, confides her adoration of the great actress and her wish to emulate her.

Getting warm? Yes, Liane, it transpires, is a hypocrite, not to say a full-fledged bitch, who insinuates herself between Esther and her actor husband, Florent, moves into their villa and all but persuades Florent to exchange the Comédie-Française for stardom in Hollywood, which is where her true ambitions lie. There, at last, she miscalculates. As Florent puts it, 'The theatre and the cinema turn their backs on each other. The beauty of the theatre,

and its miracle, is that we can be aroused by a fat Tristan and an ageing Isolde. On the screen, Tristan must have Tristan's age and Isolde, Isolde's.' Liane, in consequence, will depart alone for Hollywood: 'I find Europe suffocating. I need novelty, space, air, sunlight.' 'Spot-lights ...' murmurs Esther. 'Merde,' snaps Liane; then exits, slamming the door behind her.

As one can see, the dissimilarities with *All About Eve* are as numerous as the similarities. The central situation, nevertheless, is identical in both works, the opening scenes uncannily so. What is even more striking is the fact that Esther adopts, towards her perfidious admirer, the same teasingly self-destructive attitude as Bette Davis will do, and is just as masochistically inclined to drink her poison to the last drop. And, with Loulou hardly a match for Thelma Ritter, being addicted to malapropisms and gnomonic non sequiturs, there is instead a Celeste Holm-ish *confidante*, whose comments on the affair are those of a worldly epigrammatist. (The only difference, surely, between an epigram and a wisecrack is the accent in which it is delivered.)

There is no question here that the egg preceded the chicken, since *All About Eve* was released in 1950. The intriguing question, rather, is whether this chicken hatched out of that egg.

The Poet: Jean Cocteau in *Le Testament d'Orphée*.



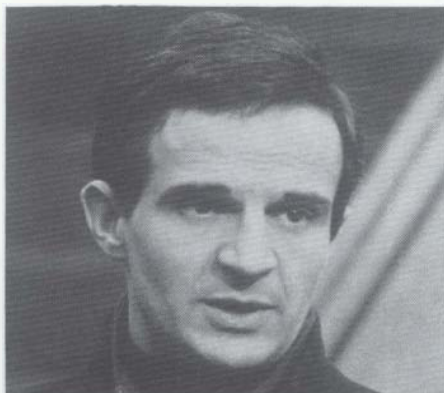
Pierrot le Sage

Edith Piaf was another *monstre sacré* celebrated by Cocteau in what he affected to call his *poésie de journalisme*. He also wrote a one-act monodrama for her, *Le Bel Indifférent*, filmed in startlingly garish colours by Jacques Demy and the model for Godard's laconic short, *Charlotte et son Jules*, with which it shares the conceit of a male character remaining mute throughout his mistress' tirade. The *chanteuse* died only a

few hours before Cocteau, which at once engendered the characteristically Coctelian legend that he himself had expired while listening to his own improvised radio tribute to her. True or not, I was reminded of that queer sequence of events by the recent, similarly coincidental deaths of François Truffaut and Oskar Werner. Indeed, were one (ha ha) of a superstitious cast of mind, one might well be disturbed by the cluster of premonitory signs which attended them.

Though a *matinée* idol in his native Austria, Werner doubtless will be most fondly remembered as the gentle, long-suffering Jules in *Jules et Jim*. In 1966 he worked again with Truffaut, playing a recalcitrant fireman who slowly acquires a political conscience in the eerie yet gorgeously Toytown-ish adaptation of Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*. By then, however, relations between them had begun to deteriorate, as the director himself was to record in his diary of the shooting of that film, published in *Cahiers du Cinéma*. To his dismay, he discovered that his protégé had been meanwhile, so to speak, 'kicked upstairs' into international stardom—stardom, moreover, of the old, discredited school. For not only was Werner comically neurotic about his 'profile', he was reluctant, during one crucial scene, to collapse in a faint, lest it compromise his 'image'. Truffaut's exasperation with him became such that, by the completion of shooting, the two men were barely on speaking terms; and, years later, when the director made his most sombre film, *La Chambre Verte*—about a writer of newspaper obituaries so obsessed with death that he erects a private shrine to his deceased friends—Werner's photograph figured prominently in the 'green room' (as did Cocteau's and that of the author of the two novellas on which the film was based, Henry James, both of them, of course, unlike Werner, already dead).

It was Truffaut himself who, with an unprofessional stiffness that I found very moving, played the necrophiliac protagonist. And if, at the time, the systematic morbidity of *La Chambre Verte* made it seem absolutely *sui generis*, a film has since emerged to which it bears a remarkable resemblance in both mood and subject-matter. I refer to Resnais' *L'Amour à Mort*, the account of a man's death, his resuscitation and his subsequent longing to die a second time, which is the latest film to feature Truffaut's companion (and the mother of his third child), Fanny Ardant. Resurrection was also a theme of *Le Testament d'Orphée*, Cocteau's 'will', financed in part by the young François Truffaut, flush from the commercial success of *Les quatre cents coups*. In one of its most beautiful sequences, the Poet (played by Cocteau himself, who else) was transfixed by the lance of the goddess Minerva; whereupon, with the behest 'Only pre-



François Truffaut, Oskar Werner.

tend to weep, my friends, since poets only pretend to die', he solemnly re-ascended from his deathbed 'without', as the published script does not fail to inform us, 'bending his knees'.

To end with, merely note that Truffaut's last film before his death was *Vivement Dimanche!* (meaning not *Finally Sunday!*, which is how it was translated in this country, but 'Roll on, Sunday!', as a schoolboy might sigh, 'Roll on, 4 o'clock!') and the name of the fireman whom Werner played in *Fahrenheit 451* was Montag, which also happens to be the German word for 'Monday'. As it turned out, Truffaut died on a Sunday, Werner the following day.

Truffaut? What can one say about him that hasn't been said? To be sure, far too much of his output struck one as unworthy of a major cinéaste, from the 'two hours of babies' bottoms', as Richard Roud scathingly put down *L'Argent de Poche*, to the 'hips that pass in the night' of the equally vapid *L'Homme Qui Aimait les Femmes*. If his precipitous decline can be attributed to any one externally verifiable factor, it would, I think, be his decision, in the 60s, to act as his own producer—a dual operation which calls to mind the old legal chestnut about a client who defends himself having a fool for a lawyer. To no one's surprise, his films became cautious and 'respectable', wholeheartedly in compliance with the codes and practices of mainstream French cinema. And yet... There was, even then, *La Chambre Verte*, a brave and, for an artist so disposed to ingratiating himself, a profoundly *contrary* project; and *Le Dernier Métro*—oddly, a solid

'prewar' movie about the Occupation.

And from the early work nothing will ever detract, made as it was when Truffaut believed in the cinema, to employ an incongruous analogy, the way the Watergate conspirators believed in the Nixon Presidency. That is how I shall prefer to remember him—youthful, fierce, incurably romantic, *Pierrot le Sage* to Godard's *Pierrot le Fou*, each of his movies the manifestation of a kind of camaraderie (or camera-derie). It is the death of *that* director which appears to me to have devalued the cinema as 'real estate', to have caused the neighbourhood to go down, as they say. Then I recall Cocteau's words from *Le Testament d'Orphée*, and I think: Dead he may be, but he will bury us all.

Cinematiclerihews

If you recall, I have in this column already quoted E. C. Bentley's celebrated clerihe on Biography and Geography. Well, it set me to wondering whether it would be possible—I won't say, advisable—to write a history of the cinema in that capricious form (defined by Frances Stillman in *The Poet's Manual and Rhyming Dictionary* as 'a humorous pseudo-biographical quatrain, rhymed as two couplets, with lines of uneven length more or less in the rhythm of prose,' and christened after its begetter, whose middle name it literally was). Though E. C. himself, notwithstanding the fact that he lived into the 1950s, composed no clerihe on films or filmmakers, his son and occasional illustrator, Nicolas, was the author of these lines on de Mille:

Cecil B. de Mille,
Rather against his will,
Was persuaded to leave Moses
Out of 'The Wars of the Roses'.

Bentley's *Complete Clerihews* was edited, annotated and prefaced by the poet Gavin Ewart, who subsequently published a volume of *Other People's Clerihews*, in which verses on Jane Fonda, Mae West, Betty Grable, Alan Ladd, Jeremy Irons, Diane Keaton and Faye Dunaway can be found. Mostly stars, as one might have predicted, and something of a ragbag miscellanea, as much in terms of subject-matter as of the quality of the versification (e.g. 'I'd rather be fed to the lions, Than watch Jeremy Irons'), though Joyce Nice contributes an ingeniously droll lampoon of Polanski:

Roman Polanski
Is a very small mansk—
So his taste in women'll
Always be criminal.

This last-quoted example, entirely personal and scurrilous in nature, is not, of course, very informative about Polanski's gifts as a director; and even Nicolas Bentley's squib on de Mille, while faithful enough to the kitschy spirit of its subject, errs in the letter,

as de Mille unaccountably omitted to inflict the Biblical Babbity of his vision on that particular era of English history. One therefore might propose as a more accurate alternative:

Cecil B. de Mille
Discovered with a thrill
That the Bible was nothing but sex
And special effects.

And off we go, from the medium's foggy dawn:

Cried Auguste Lumière,
'Vive le documentaire!'
'Hooley!'
Replied Louis.

I wince
At the name of Thomas Ince,
For his place in film history
Remains a mystery.

Through Hollywood's 'golden age':

Hitch
Was a son-of-a-bitch
And, according to Spoto,
Frequently blotto.

Howard Hawks
Hung out with jocks—
Hunters, aviators, speedway motorists
And auteurs.

Busby Berkeley
Liked shots that were circling.
That would explain why
His overheads were high.

On to the Movie Brats:

It makes John Milius
Quite bilious
When Francis Ford Coppola
Is more popular.

Martin Scorsese
Is said to be crazy.
Brian De Palma
Is calmer.

And the history of film criticism:

Of the Auteur Theory
I've grown extremely weary.
It started in Paris
And ended in Sarris.

Readers' contributions are most welcome, and the best of them will appear in the next issue of SIGHT AND SOUND. No prizes, I'm afraid, except the unbeatable, un-overrateable one of seeing one's work in print. But be warned—whatever its apparent artlessness, the cleriheh is by no means an easy form to practise (Auden's were wretchedly feeble, and I'm not too pleased with a couple of my own efforts). The rewards, on the other hand, can be incommensurately gratifying, above all in the matter of felicitous rhymes. So here, as a final incentive, is one I have titled

THE ARTIST AND THE CRITIC
Is Georges Méliès
As often on the telly as
George Melly is?
The hell he is!



François Périer as the protocol-minded Heurtebise in *Orphée*.

HEURTEBISE

UEA FILM STUDIES

**Full-time, taught MA Programme
1985-86**

1. Early Film Form: 1896-1926
2. Early Film Industry: Europe/Hollywood
3. Film Theory: Film History
4. National Cinema: Britain
5. Dissertation: Independent Research

Staff:

Charles Barr, Thomas Elsaesser, Don Ranvaud

Degree awarded on the basis of course work and dissertation in equal proportions

Further information also on Part-time, MPhil and Ph.D. degrees from:

Graduate Admissions Secretary
School of English and American Studies
University of East Anglia
Norwich NR4 7TJ
Telephone Norwich (0603) 56161

American Film Now

The People, The Power, The Money, The Movies

This updated edition of James Monaco's classic study of the movie business now covers the vital developments and issues of the 1980's. Superbly illustrated with 245 stills, this has been hailed by Paul Mazursky as "a marvellously informed, witty, insightful book." 544 pages. Hardback. **£14.95/\$24.95.** ISBN 0-918432-64-2.

International Film Guide 1985

Edited by Peter Cowie. For 22 years the benchmark annual where quality, international films are concerned. Reports from more than 50 countries, a 28 page Dossier on French Cinema of the past decade, essential guide to Festivals, plus usual sections, and a definitive History of the Shell Film Unit by Norman Vigars. Altogether 528 pages and 260 pictures for only **£6.95/\$12.95.** ISBN 0-900730-22-6.

International TV & Video Guide 1985

Edited by Richard Paterson. Rapidly establishing itself as the world's major yearbook for serious tube-watchers, with reports from 30-odd countries, interviews, profiles, data, listings etc. 256 pages and 200 pictures. **£6.95/\$12.95.** ISBN 0-900730-03-X.

Available through bookshops or (plus p & p £1/\$1.30 per title)
from: **THE TANTIVY PRESS, 136 TOOLEY STREET,
LONDON SE1.**



Kuros KING

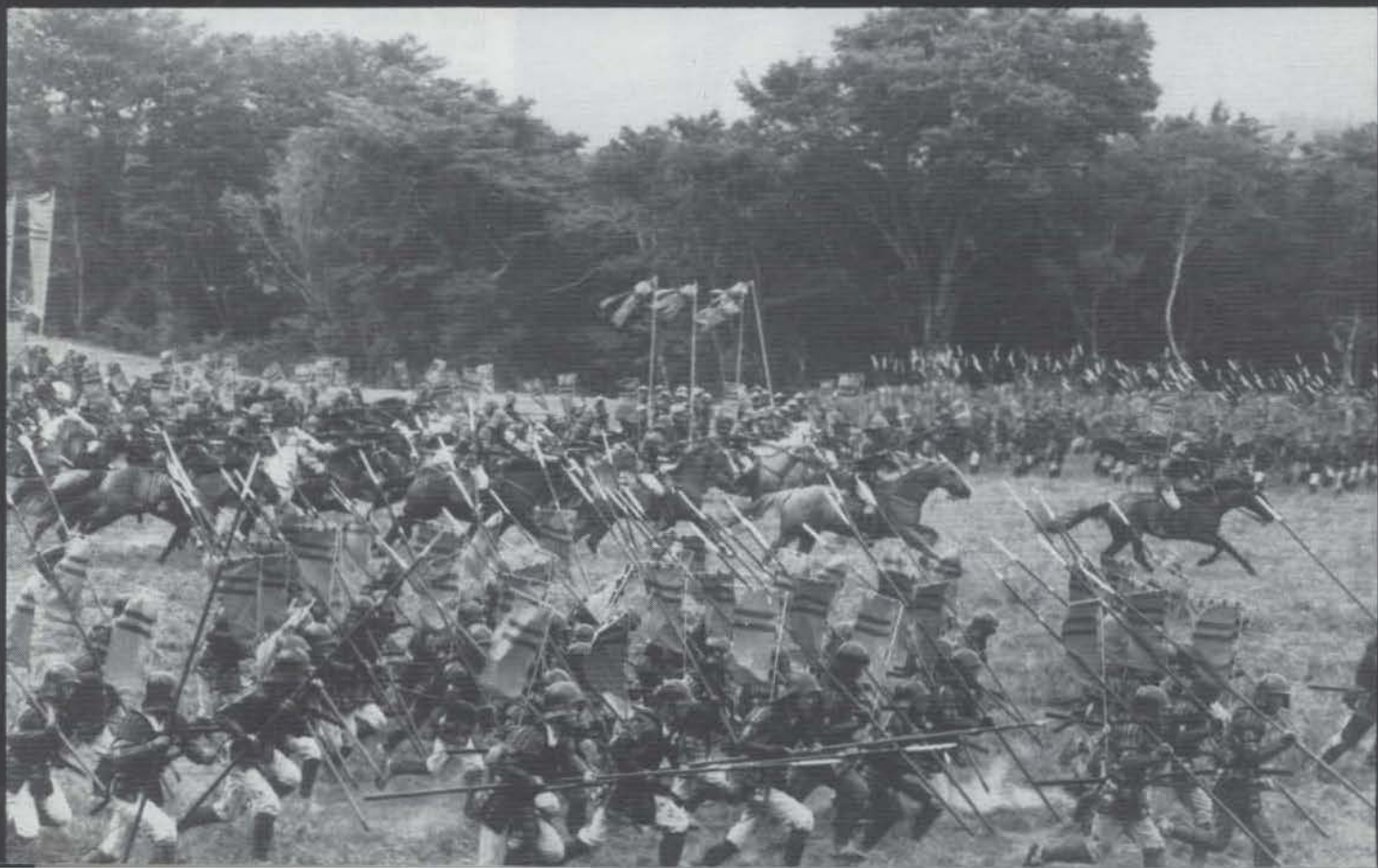
Kurosawa's free version of *King Lear* after years of delay and frustration. Serge Silberman (Bunuel's Paris producer) including the *Nippon Herald*. It become three sons; the fool is played by Tatsuya





sawa's LEAR

war (Ran) recently finished shooting, as a co-production between (producer) and various Japanese interests, Here, the three daughters have married by Peter, an agile transvestite; Taya Nakadai.



Remembering Losey

Richard Roud

MONTPELIER SQUARE

My first meeting with Joe Losey came about in 1960, as the result of a review of *The Criminal* I had written for this magazine. Although I had seen several of his earlier films, this was the first one to convince me that he was one of the important film-makers of our time. I had admired some of his American work, but this seemed to be his first European film which really fulfilled the promise of *The Prowler* and *The Dividing Line* (*The Lawless*), probably because the subject he had been offered was more congenial to his temperament and his interests: power relationships, or what the French call *rapports de force*. Although the film was called *The Criminal*, its most remarkable characterisation was that of the prison warden (played with unusually controlled viciousness by Patrick Magee), and the film powerfully rendered all the ambivalent oneness between the keeper and the kept, the murderer and the victim, the judge and the judged.

To my surprise and pleasure, I got a letter from Losey, beautifully typed on the best quality notepaper (he was very particular about such details), in which he thanked me for the review. The letter ended with an invitation to come round for a drink. He was then living with his third wife, the actress Dorothy Bromiley, in Montpelier Square, in that picturesque corner of London between Harrods and Hyde Park: one could not imagine a more English setting.

We took an instant liking to each other. Although there was a twenty-year gap in our ages, we were both Americans living in London, and there was enough of a generation overlap to allow him to talk to me about his past without, as it were, having to supply footnotes. When he first mentioned his work in New York with the *Living Newspaper*, he was surprised and pleased to discover that I knew what it was. He had been born in Wisconsin and come east to Dartmouth College; I had been born in Boston and gone to the University of Wisconsin.

Losey had come to Britain because of the McCarthy blacklisting. I don't know if Joe was or ever had been a member of the Communist Party, but he was certainly a man of the Left. He had directed the world première of Brecht's *Galileo* (with Charles Laughton) and most of his best friends were either Communist or Communist-sympathisers. Even in Europe his first three films had to be released under what the French so aptly (in this case, at least) call a *nom de guerre*. For it was indeed a war between Joe and not only the American government but also that government's representatives and sympathisers in Western Europe and Britain.

His first Hollywood movie had been a short made for MGM in 1945, *A Gun in His Hand*, for which he received an Oscar nomination. He was then already 36. True, he had made three commissioned shorts already, but it was still a late start in films. Joe didn't believe in

Rome, 1971.
Photo: Eva Sereny.



New York, 1938: Losey directing Francis Faragoh's play *Sunup to Sundown*. One of the boys is Sidney Lumet.

astrology, but he was nevertheless a little upset when, in the late 1930s, just before the première of his first stage production, a friend took him to an astrologer who told him that, as a Capricorn, he should expect neither fame nor success until he was at least 50. Oddly enough, *The Servant*, which most people would call his first real success, came when he was 54.

MARKHAM STREET

After that first meeting, and the retrospective season of his work which I organised at the National Film Theatre shortly thereafter, I lost sight of Joe for nearly two years. One reason was that he was abroad making *Eva*; another was that his domestic situation was changing. After his divorce from Dorothy, he met Patricia Tolusso (née Mohan) in Rome, where they were introduced by Hugo Butler, one of the scriptwriters for *Eva*. They fell in love, she divorced Signor Tolusso, and the next time we met Joe had married Patricia and they had rented a house in Markham Street.

When Joe had finished *The Servant*, his first film scripted by Harold Pinter, he invited me to a private screening in Audley Square. It was the first film, I think, that he had ever made without any outside interference, and I thought it was a truly remarkable work. Losey had told me only that the script was based on a short novel by Robin Maugham, and that it was a kind of Faust-film. But it was a lot more than that. Like *The Criminal* (indeed, one is tempted to say, like all his films before and after), it was about power relationships. In this case it dealt with the destruction of a weak man by a stronger one, and perhaps also the destruction of an obsolete upper class by a ruthless but more realistic rising middle class. Dirk Bogarde gave what I still think was, perhaps his greatest performance as the

servant who preyed on his young master's weaknesses in order to take over the household.

That year I was programming the first New York Film Festival. I wanted the film for New York and I wanted Joe to come over to present it; and heaven knows he wanted to go back to America, where he hadn't been since 1951. He was worried, however, that there might be trouble with the immigration authorities. I assured him that the then Secretary of the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, John Mazzola, had made certain that there would be no trouble at Kennedy Airport, so Joe agreed to come.

As it turned out, there was no trouble at all—no questions, nothing. When we met in the city, Joe seemed almost disappointed at the ease with which the exile had been allowed to return. At first I thought he was just being perverse, quirky. But thinking it over, I realised that the fact that there had been no trouble, that no one in the government cared one way or the other, was almost an affront. Joe had been self-exiled for over ten years, forced to start a new life abroad, and the issues that had made him feel he *had* to leave were so dead that it seemed retroactively to devalue all his sacrifices.

The Servant was well received in America, and this pleased Joe a great deal, for he never lost his feeling that he was an American, and his dearest wish in his last years was to return to the States to make at least one film there 'before I die'. There were several projects (among them the James Kennaway novel *Silence*), but they all came to nothing.

The following year brought *King and Country*, again with Dirk Bogarde, which was as classical in style as *The Servant* had been baroque (a word Joe hated to hear applied to his work, by the way). Again it was the story of the conflict between two men (the other being Tom Courtenay who, partly thanks to Bogarde's restrained and supportive

performance, was overwhelming as the World War I deserter). Then, two years later, *Modesty Blaise*, a film I did not like very much. (Nor did Penelope Houston, who encapsulated its essential impermanence by calling it Losey's Paper Handkerchief). Joe was not pleased with my displeasure, and I thought this was the end of our relationship. But no. The following year I got a note from him announcing a screening of *Accident*, again scripted by Pinter. He said I would find him 'back at the old stand again'. This was typical of Joe: his opinions of his own films often changed, and he now seemed to think that I might not have been completely wrong about *Modesty Blaise*.

There were some fans who didn't admire *Accident*: I seem to remember Susan Sontag and Elliott Stein coming out of it in London saying it was 'contrived'. And of course it was. Edgardo Cozarinsky has pointed out the remarkable cross-cutting between 'sequences which, in story development, are neither simultaneous nor associated by flashback but plainly contiguous.' The film was further distinguished by its use of non-synchronised dialogue (who can forget the soundless sequence with Delphine Seyrig and Dirk Bogarde as seen through the window of Nick's Diner?) and by the near-surrealist scene of indoor rugby.

Losey's career was strewn with unrealised projects. It was during the period of *Accident* that he first spoke of his desire to make a film of *Under the Volcano*, with Richard Burton as the Consul. I still think *Under the Volcano* is an unfilmable book, but Joe might have done a better job than John Huston eventually did. At least he would probably have been able to find visual equivalents for the baroque style of Lowry's writing, and while Joe was no alcoholic, he was acquainted with vodka, if not with tequila. It was also around this time that, through Sonia Orwell, he met Marguerite Duras. He was eager to film her *Sailor from Gibraltar*. She was enthusiastic, too, but of course it was Tony Richardson who finally made the film.

ROYAL AVENUE

After leaving Markham Street, the Loseys lived for a time in flats lent them by Robin Maugham and then Tom Courtenay. Finally, they borrowed money from Joe's sister Mary to buy a house. Faithful to Chelsea, he and Patricia settled in Royal Avenue, the very street on which *The Servant* had been set. It is a beautiful avenue, lined with eighteenth century houses separated by a wide tree-lined centre strip. It had been intended to go from Wren's Palladian Royal Hospital as far as Kensington Palace, a long French-style street-picture perspective, but for some reason it only got as far as the King's Road (one block, in fact). The house meant a lot to Joe; as is evident from his films, decor was important to him.

Joe and Patricia were abroad for the next year or so during the shooting of *Boom* and *Figures in a Landscape*. Then came his finest achievement: *The Go-Between*. In adapting L. P. Hartley's full-length novel (both *The Servant* and *Accident* were fairly short novels), Pinter and Losey reduced the story to its essence, and then Losey's job was in a sense to blow it up again, to restore the novelistic density, the texture, the life by cinematic means.

For example, the novel has a prologue and an epilogue: both are discarded, and instead there is a double articulation of time. As the story of one Edwardian summer runs along, it is interrupted, at first only by occasional flashes, later by longer scenes, of Colston (the boy go-between) arriving in Norwich forty years later. The effect of this playing with time is even more intense than in *Accident*. And although, like so many of Losey's films, this one is about the self-destructive male, it also contains his most dramatic study of a battle of wills between two women, the mother (Margaret Leighton) and daughter (Julie Christie). The battle is the more gripping because it is expressed only in guarded looks, conversational gambits and raised eyebrows. More than in his previous films, Losey achieved here an almost palpable sense of reality, which gives the moral force of the film a greater intensity. You can feel the clothes, you can smell the heat; and because all these sensual details are so physically realised, you end up hearing the unsaid, seeing the unseen.

The next step in Losey's career would ideally have been Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*. Producer Nicole Stéphane, who owned the rights, had decided she wanted Joe to direct it, and he asked Harold Pinter to script it. All she needed was the money. So, in the meantime, Joe made four more films: *The Assassination of Trotsky*, *Galileo*, *A Doll's House* and *The Romantic Englishwoman*. They were not among his best work, partly, I think, because he was obsessed with the Proust project. But there were other reasons. He had waited too long to do *Galileo*; not through choice, of course, but projects can go stale. And that other theatrical adaptation, *A Doll's House*, seemed to be not really a subject to which Joe could contribute much. *The Romantic Englishwoman*, too, for different reasons, did not seem to cry out for his talents. The Trotsky film was the best of the four, but there was still something not quite right about it—perhaps because of Joe's ambivalent attitude towards Trotsky.

In between his sojourns abroad, life went on much the same at Royal Avenue. Except when Joe went through one of his periodic self-enforced bouts of teetotalism. He could be difficult without a little vodka to smooth things over. Nor was he always in good health: his asthma never stopped troubling him, and there were other functional disorders. He was also often pained by what he considered to be a lack of appreciation from American and British audiences and critics. This

may have been an exaggeration, but it is true that he was more highly thought of in France and Italy. And, more important, Joe was appreciated more by his peers on the continent than in Britain. Resnais and Bertolucci admired him greatly—in particular his direction of actors. Indeed, this was one of the most important things about his films—the actors he chose and how he directed them, how he was able to let them contribute to the film.

Joe was no one-man band. Not only were his actors important to him, but there were also his collaborators: Reginald Beck, who edited most of his films; Gerry Fisher, who shot most of them; Richard MacDonald, who not only did the sets but also worked out the 'storyboards' with Joe. The secret of his success with actors (and of course I mean actresses as well) lay in the fact that he really liked them. He could, however, be amused by their foibles. I remember him telling me that after the shooting of *Boom*, Elizabeth Taylor approached Richard MacDonald and asked if he would agree to do the decor for the private jet plane she and Richard Burton had just bought. MacDonald said he would be happy to oblige, but could she give him some idea of what style she had in mind. When she replied without hesitation 'Regency', he, unfazed, simply said, 'Where am I going to put the fireplace?'

RUE DU DRAGON

I never fully understood the state of Joe's finances—except that it always seemed to be either boom or bust. Only now that his estate has been published in *The Times* do I realise just how bad things were, for all Joe left behind him was £1,600. During a year in which he made no film, he had to borrow money. But when, as in 1972, he made both *Galileo* and *The Romantic Englishwoman* in the same tax year, he had not only to pay back the debts of the previous year but also to pay the tax on the earnings from two films. It was for this reason that Joe's accountants told him he had to leave England for several years at least. But where to go? Since the Proust project was still a possibility, he chose Paris.

Once more, Joe and Patricia found a nice place to live, though it was really too small for any couple, let alone for a man who worked a great deal at home. Joe was not happy in Paris. True, he was recognised by taxi drivers, butchers and bakers (and I can bear witness to this), but he didn't speak French very well, and he felt cut off. In 1976 he made his first French film, *Monsieur Klein*. Many critics count it as one of his finest, and indeed it ought to have been, for the subject was congenial, the actors good. Somehow, however, I felt that it didn't quite work. Perhaps because it was too perfect a 'Losey subject', perhaps because Alain Delon was not the right type of actor for the part—not obsessive enough. And then the Proust film finally fell through, as did *Under the Volcano*, *Nostromo* and *Voss*. Losey's next French

film, *Les Routes du Sud*, had an uninspiring script and was wrongly cast. I don't know what Joe himself thought of it, but he never once said a word about it to me, even though I was seeing him quite regularly.

VICENZA

It was Daniel Toscan du Plantier of Gaumont who pulled Joe out of his depression by asking him to make a film of *Don Giovanni*. Joe hesitated, but not for long. He liked the opera, and thought he could do something special with it. Rather than shoot the film in Spain, he chose to do it in and around Vicenza, using almost exclusively villas and other buildings by Palladio.

We hadn't seen each other for a while, and when I was invited by Gaumont to the shooting of the film in November 1978, Joe hadn't been told. That day they were in Palladio's Teatro Olimpico, so it was there I went. I settled down unobtrusively in a seat in the theatre, while Joe was directing a scene on stage. Then, during a break, he looked over the footlights and caught sight of me. 'Well,' he said, 'I thought you were dead.' Joe knew that I had not really liked his preceding three of four films, and he was very susceptible to slights. But he was soon his genial self again. He invited me that night to dinner and we spent a pleasant evening in the nearby villa where he and Patricia were staying.

After the success of *Don Giovanni*, Joe was able to pay off his British taxes, and he wanted to return to London. But he made one more film before leaving France, *La Truite*, based on a novel by Roger Vailland which he had wanted to do for years. In some ways, it was his most rewardingly complex film. It dealt with the relations between power and sex—all kinds of power and all kinds of sex. The heroine, herself as slippery as a trout, is a ferociously independent young woman who begins her life working on a trout farm and ends up owning one. This 'naive' peasant girl is more than a match for the three rich businessmen who find her attractive: the one man she really loves is her homosexual husband—perhaps because their marriage has never been consummated. The film was not generally well received, and I never quite understood why. Perhaps the plot-lines were too complex, perhaps there was too much incident, perhaps the novel was no longer as interesting to Joe as it once had been. But one thing it did prove (although *Eva* and *Secret Ceremony* ought to have done that years ago): Joe was not only a great director of actors, but also of actresses. In *The Trout*, Isabelle Huppert, Jeanne Moreau and Alexis Smith were all superb.

ROYAL AVENUE

Once Joe got back to the Royal Avenue house, plans began to materialise. There was to be a new film with a Pinter script: an adaptation of William Trevor's *Fools*

of *Fortune*. The money was there, and the contracts were ready for signing. But the first project to be realised was Patricia Losey's adaptation of Nell Dunn's play *Steaming*, still to be released, and which I have not yet been able to see.

The last time I saw Joe was at his 75th birthday party in January 1984. He was in good spirits and seemed genuinely to be enjoying himself, for that very day he had succeeded in getting Vanessa Redgrave to play in *Steaming*. I was in London again in April, but when I phoned, Patricia said Joe wasn't feeling too well and that we had better wait until I came back to London after Cannes in June. For some reason I didn't

phone then, and it was only when I arrived in New York that I discovered that Joe had died on 22 June while I was on the high seas. This made me remember all the more fondly the trip we had taken together on the old S.S. France in 1970, when Joe was coming over for the commercial opening of *The Go-Between*. Joe had liked the idea of crossing by ship (Conrad was one of his favourite writers) and he was treated like a king by the staff and crew of the French Line. But he grew impatient after a day or two as he always did when he was not working. Then, too, this royal treatment was in too great a contrast to what he wanted from Americans (and Britons). But, of

course, directors aren't superstars in either Britain or America, and this is something Joe ought to have realised.

The most important reason for his discontent was, as always, the fact that he could not make as many movies as he wanted to. And that he was often obliged to make films he would have preferred not to make. Joe could not content himself with the great body of work he did accomplish. He always wanted to do more. Be patient, people would tell him, but Joe was not a patient man. His driving sense of urgency is what made him so stimulating to be with, and what gave his films their excitement and their power. ■

Vicenza, 1978: *Don Giovanni*. Losey at the Villa Rotonda.



Looking at the Rubber Duck

NICOLAS ROEG
talks to
RICHARD COMBS
about working with
François Truffaut on
Fahrenheit 451

I've always felt that, although Truffaut was greatly revered and admired, at the same time, in terms of film and how much he loved film, he was underestimated. Because he was known to be a literary man, someone who was enormously fond of literature, he was adopted by a very literary set. But in fact his love of literature was separate from his love of film. I think that's why, many times, he has been underestimated as an essentially visual person. I enjoyed working with him tremendously on *Fahrenheit 451*, which was a film very much to be 'read' in terms of images. I suppose he was the first director, the first film person, with whom I'd enjoyed having a conversation about film, or the hope of film. There weren't many about in those days.

I remember there was a lot of criticism of *Fahrenheit* to do with François' know-

ledge of English. The critics complained that it was so stilted. But that had all been quite deliberate. He hadn't even wanted to place it as an English film, or to suggest that the language was necessarily English. The script was written first in French, deliberately, so that it could be translated into English, then translated back into French, because he wanted to lose the English idiom completely, then finally translated back into English. He wanted it set—and I thought this was a marvellously futuristic idea—in a time when people had lost the use of language. After all, the whole premise of the film was to do with losing a literary background. And that was completely missed by the critics.

There was even one little clue which Truffaut put inside the film, because he didn't want this to be mistaken. There

was a scene where Montag and Clarisse are sitting talking; they can see the fire station, and a man comes up and puts a note through the letter box. Montag explains why that is, people reporting on each other. Clarisse says, oh, he's just a common informer; and Montag says, informant. Stilted things, stilted phrases: that was absolutely putting the dot on the 'i'. We've even seen that sort of thing come to pass. Language is flattened slightly. You see it in films: in the 30s and 40s in America they used words in films that they wouldn't put in a script today. I don't know whether it's an apocryphal story, but apparently when George Cukor did a remake of *Old Acquaintance* as *Rich and Famous*, they did research into the title, and hardly anyone in America knew what an acquaintance was.

François was aware of that, and he realised that images were things to be read. Like the scene where Montag is sitting in bed with comics. Those comics were very carefully designed; they were a form of shorthand, so that the news could be read in pictures. The beauty of the language wasn't what was important. It was like a rather intimate film where language means a lot, but we no longer have the language. So you virtually have to read the pictures. It implies there will come a time when people will still have all those emotions, but you have to read them through other indications, other signs. It was a sign language once, and maybe we'll go back to that.

François thought the stranglehold of the written word was going to be equalled, if not superseded, by the idea of images. I guess it takes a long time; he thought it was coming quicker. But in some ways one forgets how quickly things have changed. For instance, he wanted no written signs, and in the fire station there was nothing written. It was very difficult to work those signs out. But think about how road signs have changed. Once when you drove down the road you'd have to read dozens of things—road bears to the left, school ahead—but now they're just children with a stripe through them, so we can drive anywhere in Europe. At the time that was a very filmic thought: the essence of film. I'm sure that was why he was attracted to the story.

I'd hate it to be forgotten just how much of that kind of a film-maker he was. Not just charming stories and enchanting acting. For instance, he wanted to make a film with small children, babies, just to get their expression at the point when words aren't quite understandable. We had a scene in *Fahrenheit*, with a baby lying in his pram in the park, and the fire chief turns him over and finds a book underneath. Another aspect of that is the scene at the end with the book people—who are all wrong. The veneration of literature—which he loved—is all wrong. The boy who is reciting from Stevenson, reciting after the old man, has got it wrong. And there are twins who announce themselves as *Pride and Prejudice*, Part One and Part Two, but of course there isn't a Part One and

Part Two in *Pride and Prejudice*. All these things were missed by the very people who had revered him as a literary film-maker.

It's the same with acting. Oskar Werner—who tragically also died a few weeks ago—was at the time, as I remember, just starting to enter a successful, commercial stage of his life. And he was rather concerned about his image. It appeared to be, or I surmise, that Oskar thought this was a film he was doing for François, because he owed him something or he liked him. But at that stage of his career he just wanted to get it over with. To play the part of Montag, you have to be completely dedicated to the thing. So he didn't enter fully into the film. But François won in the end; he had to, again by the use of film, by juxtaposing one thing with another. Whatever meaning you tell me you are putting into that performance, I shall change it by making you look at a rubber duck. If you look seriously at this man when I want you to be smiling, because I want you not to understand what is happening, I shall use that serious look. I shall make you be looking at a rubber duck while he is talking. So that you will look seriously as if you don't understand.

Every single piece in the construction of the film was visual. I remember when the art department brought a beautifully made model of a fire engine into the office of Cyril Cusack, who played the fire chief. It was like the model that a ship's captain would traditionally have had in his cabin. But François said, no, no, go to a toy shop and get me a toy. Because that sort of skill is already gone from the world. It was a toy world in which all the skills had been lost. When we discussed the look of the film, he said, I don't want it to have a reality, I want it as a Doris Day film, with little shining colours. We had great trouble, because at that time people were going for a tremendous realism. I was ordering

huge brutes, to make it high key, glossy, like Technicolor.

He also wanted a certain sense of awkwardness in behaviour patterns. After all, things change subtly. I've always noticed that films set in any sort of future very rarely draw on the present. But just imagine someone a hundred years ago trying to predict the present. I live in a house that's a hundred years old. Its internal functions are different, the carriages outside are different—but it's a mixture. Things don't all go away. That's why we began *Fahrenheit* with those aerials and things on top of suburban houses, although inside the houses are sliding doors—which don't work. . . . Changes are so subtle: relationships, manners, our behaviour. I thought it was quite a frightening film in that respect. But it's very difficult to read that. It's easier to see something you can be totally in awe of. Something which is part of your life and has taken on another aspect is much more difficult to believe in.

François was rather sanguine about the failure of *Fahrenheit*, critically and commercially. One time when we were having dinner he said, it must have been a bad film. I asked why? He said, nobody went to see it. In terms of his film-making, I don't think he pulled back after that at all. But *Fahrenheit* might have been a stretch which he was not given the chance to do again. And he wasn't a man to explain himself. He'd rather go on: a futuristic present-day person. He was wonderful about the past. He told me how he hated costume pictures where they tell you these were the clothes they wore from 1490 to 1498, and then these clothes were worn from 1498 to 1502. He said, I like to have a lot of clothes, sort of turn of the century, and just put them in a basket and have the artists try some of them on. After all, the jacket I am wearing is fifteen years old. I am not always in fashion. ■

Fahrenheit 451: François Truffaut and Nicolas Roeg.



Jonathan Rosenbaum

GOLD DIGGERS OF 1953

Howard Hawks' *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*

1ST NUMBER:

 **We're Just Two Little
Girls from Little Rock** 

**'I don't believe in the kino-eye; I
believe in the kino-fist.'**

—Sergei Eisenstein

Before even the credit titles can appear, Marilyn Monroe and Jane Russell arrive to a blast of music at screen centre from behind a black curtain, in matching orange-red outfits that sizzle the screen—covered with spangles, topped with feathers—to look at one another, toss white ermines towards the camera and out of frame and sing robustly in unison. As electrifying as the opening of any Hollywood movie that comes to mind, this jazzy materialisation so catches us by surprise that we are scarcely aware of the scene's fleeting modulations as the dynamic duo makes it through a single chorus. The black curtain changes to a lurid blue, then a loud purple; the two women twice exchange their positions on stage while gradually dancing down a few steps; and the complex flurry of gestures they make towards each other—all gracefully dovetailed into Jack Cole's deft choreography—makes the spectator feel assaulted by them as a team as well as individually: a double threat.

As awesome a demonstration of kino-fist strategies as anything in *Potemkin*, this opening to *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* is just the first in a series of rude shocks. The second comes only moments later—after the credits have appeared over the same stage curtain and an offscreen choral version of 'Diamonds Are a Girl's Best Friend' (in a passage of relative respite, during which we're shuttled through no less than seven more garish colour changes)—when, after 'Little Rock' resumes, the film cuts from Monroe singing solo to a reverse angle of a tuxedo-clad Tommy Noonan watching, waving and wanly blowing a kiss from a cabaret table. The lumpy, passive, decisively unheroic presence of Noonan in the shot—as the



film viewer's uninvited surrogate, as a neuter/neutral surface off which the dynamism of Monroe is allowed to ricochet—creates a dialectical montage of collision, like lightning striking a plateful of mush, as jolting in its way as the first apparition of Monroe and Russell.

Henceforth, all Howard Hawks' cards

are on the table. The viewer is warned that the unbridled spectacle of his two female stars and the flabby repose of male reaction shots comprise the dialectical limits of this film's cartoon universe, and the only equals to be seen anywhere will be the two stars themselves. Indeed, in a world where competition and corruption are taken for

granted, their non-competitive friendship forms a united front which is the film's only moral centre.

If we pause, finally, to consider the words of their song, the notion of spiritual kinship becomes even more striking when we realise that they're assuming precisely the same identity. They begin as 'two little girls from Little Rock' who 'lived on the wrong side of the tracks.' But after Monroe takes over to describe how, after 'someone' broke her heart in Little Rock and she 'up and left the pieces there,' she eventually drifted to New York with a more hardened view of men and what she wanted from them, Russell promptly becomes the 'I' in the same narrative: 'Now one of these days in my fancy clothes/I'm going back home to punch the nose,' before they end in unison, 'Of the one who broke my heart ... in Little Rock.'

In effect, though neither Lorelei Lee (Monroe) nor Dorothy Shaw (Russell) has yet been introduced as a character, the movie is already offering both as Lorelei the gold digger. If we check back to Anita Loos' 1925 flapper novel which provided the original source material, written in the form of Lorelei's diary, we discover that she's the only one who comes from Little Rock, and her departure is precipitated specifically by shooting an unfaithful lover. Yet with a magical transmutation made possible by musicals, the movie Lorelei is accorded not only a softer centre but a spiritual essence multiplied by two, and distributed equally to Dorothy.

Hawks is famous as the director who never once deigned to film a flashback, and the pasts with which he furnishes his characters before their screen appearances are generally scanty. Sometimes this involves an unhappy love affair, as in *Only Angels Have Wings* and *Rio Bravo*; here it is dispensed with as quickly as possible, vaguely to motivate Lorelei's gold-digging, and then just as quickly dropped so that the rest of the movie can bask in the immanence of a continuous present tense. The thing to stress is that the absence of any narrative discontinuity between song and story makes the numbers a form of *being* for both characters rather than a form of acting; and within this being, Dorothy is quite willing to assume or share Lorelei's identity, without warning, explanation or regret.

While Hawks' only pure musical might conceivably be the most popular of his movies today, critics on the whole tend to be confounded by it. Treated only marginally in books devoted to the director, it has received attention more recently from feminist writers, who often disagree about essential characteristics. For Maureen Turin ('Gentlemen Consume Blondes', *Wide Angle*, No 1), it is sexist, racist and colonialist; for Lucie Arbuthnot and Gail Seneca ('Text and Pre-Text: *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*', *Film Reader*, No 5), it is jubilantly feminist and, at least by implication, proto-lesbian. Molly Haskell ('Howard Hawks' in *Cinema: A Critical Dic-*

tionary), no less persuasively, finds it 'as close to satire as Hawks' films ever get on the nature (and perversion) of sexual relations in America, particularly in the mammary-mad 50s.'

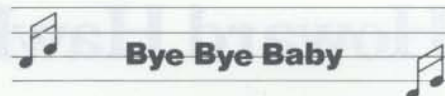
Like the blind men grasping different parts of the elephant, each of these writers is on to something—which helps to explain why the movie manages to accommodate some of the viewpoints and fantasies of heterosexuals and homosexuals of both genders. If doubts remain (as with Robin Wood, Gerald Mast, Leland Pogue and Donald Willis in their Hawks books), these mainly have to do with the lacklustre male leads, Noonan and Elliott Reid. But Richard Dyer in *Stars* goes further and, in judicious detail, finds incoherence at the very heart of the film, in the figure of Lorelei as played by Monroe: 'a quite massive disjunction' between the innocence of Monroe's image and the calculation of Lorelei's character. 'This is not a question of Lorelei/Monroe being one thing one moment and another the next, but of her being simultaneously polar opposites.'

In so far as Lorelei/Monroe is perceived as an isolated character, Dyer's point is irrefutable. But seen as an integral function in a diabolical machine that also incorporates Russell, Noonan and Reid, she projects a coherence and legibility that is as sharply defined as theirs. In fact, the movie's innate capacity to suggest readability and unreadability, feminism and sexism, optimism and pessimism, beauty and grotesquerie at one and the same time makes it the ideal capitalist product, malleable to every consumer need: a distillation of Hollywood which is also a parody of same, a calculated/innocent excess of effect which rewards characters and spectators equally so that everybody gets what they think they want.

This may help to explain why a striking number of contemporary viewers,

Maureen Turin among them, misremember the film as being in CinemaScope, that standard-bearer of 50s amplitude. Admittedly, it was released by Fox only a few months before the company unleashed CinemaScope with *The Robe* and *How to Marry a Millionaire*, the latter of which had both Monroe and a related theme. But one is tempted to add another reason for this error, which is aesthetic: that *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* has the overall effect of the process without actually using it. Try imagining, for instance, the final shot—Reid, Russell, Monroe and Noonan all facing the camera and wedding altar, with plenty of space between them—and the format naturally imposes itself.

2ND NUMBER:



The movie's plot—the exploits of Lorelei and Dorothy as they sail from New York to Paris and back again on the *Ile de Paris*—both elaborates on the essence of the five musical numbers and gives the viewer a chance to recover from the last while preparing for the next. Lorelei, single-mindedly in search of money, is sent to Paris with a letter of credit by her wealthy fiancé Gus (Noonan). Dorothy, single-mindedly in search of love (or sex), is given a free ride as Lorelei's chaperone, while Gus' sceptical father hires private detective Malone (Reid) to spy on Lorelei and report any indiscretions ... While the stars board the liner, along with members of an Olympics team who immediately arouse Dorothy's interest, they repair to adjacent staterooms. Dorothy is joined by the relay team and others, Lorelei by Gus with parting gifts, and two versions of 'Bye Bye Baby' soon get under way.

Going aboard: Marilyn Monroe, Jane Russell, Tommy Noonan.



In Hawks' non-musicals, songs usually figure to celebrate groups and allegiances that have recently formed: Jean Arthur and flyers in *Only Angels Have Wings*, Barbara Stanwyck and nightclub patrons in *Ball of Fire*, Lauren Bacall and Hoagy Carmichael in *To Have and Have Not*. Here the same process is at work, starting from the warmth that spreads between Dorothy and the relay team and radiating outward. But, oddly enough, Dorothy is again singing a song that makes sense only for Lorelei, who is saying goodbye to Gus. Dorothy has invited the team and their friends into her room for a party, and after taking a few dance turns with one athlete she starts to sing her euphoric farewell—irrationally—to several of them in turn, before they respond as a chorus and some of their women friends follow suit.

Perhaps these women are seeing off the team; which gives the male and female choruses, if not Dorothy, some reason for singing the song. But the scene immediately follows an 'intimate' scene between Lorelei and Gus and seems to relate to them even more, although they are now absent from the shot. Lorelei's repeated use of 'Daddy' as her pet-name for Gus, delivered in Monroe's inimitable babytalk, makes her or Gus the 'baby' of the subsequent song more than anyone else, although the sentiment gets weirdly displaced.

A plea for faithfulness couched in the paradoxical form of a spirited lullaby, the song would be wholly logical only if Gus sang it to Lorelei. But Lorelei has just subverted this theoretical possibility by teasing Gus that he 'can be a pretty naughty boy sometimes', thereby turning the tables and forestalling any such charges on his part. And as soon as Dorothy and her party complete their two choruses, it is Lorelei who sprints Gus back to the privacy of the next cabin to sing a slower, more sultry version of the same tune.

Seeing Monroe really turn it on—tripping her finger up Gus' lapel, caressing his shoulder and forcing him to keep close eye contact with her while he blushes and blanches—one is irresistibly reminded of Chaplin with his female victims in *Monsieur Verdoux*, confidently running glissandos up and down his own sexual narcissism. The exchange of sex (or its promise) for capital is equally brazen in both characters, and the fact that in each case it is being performed by a charismatic star—Chaplin near the end of his reign, Monroe at the virtual 'onset' of hers—makes it register with a decidedly Brechtian aftertaste. (If Monroe and Chaplin are equally predators, the spectator surely qualifies as part of their prey.) Hawks is again using Gus as a cartoon stand-in for the leering spectator in the stalls, but by folding this unsettling equation into the middle of Dorothy's good-natured altruism, he removes the potential sting from the insult, confuses the issue.

Sure enough, as Lorelei is about to conclude her vamp version, Dorothy, now the delighted observer, slaps the wall to announce her presence, Lorelei returns the song to up-tempo and the crowd joins in for a final chorus. The ship's bell rings, a voice calls out 'All Ashore' and the whole happy company—Gus and Lorelei, Dorothy and party—race to the deck amid festive streamers. By the time Lorelei's voice briefly prevails over the others as she prepares to bestow on Gus a farewell kiss (accompanied, as usual, by cartoon sound effects to indicate his swooning response), her inspired if cold hypocrisy has fused indistinguishably with Dorothy's bland if warm sincerity, so that each becomes an untroubled facet of the other. Here and elsewhere, they jointly project a true image of artificiality or an artificial image of the truth—the two possibilities are collapsed into a single

aggressive personality, looking for men.

If it seems that the lumpy male spectator has just been sent packing, this turns out to be only half true. Just as Dorothy is always ready to take over for Lorelei, so Detective Malone, as lumpy and unstarlike as Gus, is waiting on board to take over as male spectator surrogate. Like Dorothy, he is less identified with wealth, hence more 'normal' in the film's terms. But the distinction is only superficial: for most of the movie, he protects the interest of Gus and his father as faithfully as Dorothy protects and defends Lorelei.

'Never have two women gotten along together so well in a musical'

—Norman Mailer

Central to the achievement of *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* is the extraordinary rapport between Jane Russell and Marilyn Monroe, which constantly enhances the interaction between Dorothy and Lorelei. This notion of documentary imposed over fiction is related to Hawks' flair for instilling a relaxed atmosphere on his sets. One recalls the real romance that developed between Bacall and Bogart while shooting *To Have and Have Not*, the graceful incorporation of Dean Martin's drinking in *Rio Bravo*. In the latter film, John Wayne's acute embarrassment when faced with Angie Dickinson's underwear seems to express the discomfort of the actor as well as of the character. Indeed, apart from the flat villains in both films, one could argue that Walter Brennan is the only prominent actor in either who constructs a wholly fictional character; the others are treated more generally as house guests.

It is worth noting, therefore, that Monroe and Russell actually became friends while working on *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*—despite the fact that Russell was paid \$200,000 for her part (and got top billing), while Monroe, on her Fox salary and not yet a star, got only \$500 a week. Hawks once explained their unusual 'chemistry' as screen presences by describing Monroe as a fantasy and Russell as 'real'. *Mutatis mutandis*, this anticipates the strategy of Hawks enthusiast Jacques Rivette two decades later, in pairing the cartoon-like Juliet Berto with the more theatrically trained and earthbound Dominique Labourier in *Céline et Julie vont en Bateau*. (Not coincidentally, the two French actresses were *already* friends.) To understand the curious logic of either film, the personality crossovers and theatrical impersonations, one ultimately has to see the two actresses as the dialectical yet compatible sides of a single female character, and all the men in the cast as variations on a single male character.

3RD NUMBER:

**Ain't There Anyone
Here For Love?**

As soon as the trip is under way, Lorelei, under the watchful eye of the eavesdropping Malone, checks the passenger

Detective Malone (Elliott Reid) is robbed of his evidence.



list for 'suitable' (i.e. rich) escorts for Dorothy. 'I want you to find happiness and stop having fun,' she insists, objecting to Dorothy's current interest in the Olympics team. Dorothy proceeds to the indoor pool and gym where, surrounded by muscular athletes, she learns that they all have to be in bed by nine. A whistle summons them to their exercises and a male chorus begins to count to four to start them off. The number that follows reverses the premise of the last two by privileging the viewpoint of a female spectator, Dorothy, and isolating her from Lorelei.

A retreating camera exposes a screenful of bulging male flesh traversing the frame in various exercises, and Dorothy proceeds to deliver her up-tempo query/lament while threading her way through a labyrinth of indifferent bodies. For the most part, she seems as alienated from this dehumanised spectacle as they are from her, and the few desultory glances she gives, whether sceptical or entreating, are all met by equivalent blank stares. In some early shots, one glimpses a group of female ogles and women in the pool, the latter of whom Dorothy addresses; around the middle of the number, the camera isolates her in frontal close-up, underlining her apartness. But near the end, when she stoops near the edge of the pool so that athletes can dive over her, she gets knocked into the water, which quickly reintegrates her into the surrounding community. A group of men hoist her out and on to their shoulders; a waiter serves her a drink and, as she finishes the song, she and the men have resumed friendly eye contact.

In short, her song passes through four forms of address—to other women, to herself, to the camera, to everyone—while implicitly addressing itself also to an offscreen Lorelei, whose infantile absorption in money seems equivalent to the loveless narcissism on display here. Yet the sheer physicality of this campy, materialist sequence is merely the

culmination of a trait that has characterised the film so far: the cramming of massive bodies (or masses of bodies) into the frame. Practically every shot has featured the commanding bulk of the stars, the self-effacing (shy or secretive) bulk of the two male leads, and/or teeming crowds of extras, and the gym number is only clarifying this profusion of bodies by making it more blatant and functional. Trying to reconcile the contrary drives towards narcissism and friendship, the film uses these bodies along with diamonds (bulk versus glitter; warmth versus cold) as props in a philosophical debate between Dorothy and Lorelei which the *mise en scène* is continually expounding.

4TH NUMBER:

When Love Goes Wrong, Nothing Goes Right

'If we can't empty his pockets between us, we're not worthy of the name Woman.'

—Dorothy to Lorelei

Despite the apparent equality established in the plot and the division of musical numbers, Dorothy plays second fiddle to Lorelei whenever money is around, which is most of the time. On ship, for instance, we're introduced to another pair of male spectator surrogates, both wealthy and smitten with Lorelei: Piggy (Charles Coburn), a childish septuagenarian, and Henry Spofford III (George Winslow), a mature toddler. Monroe and both actors are refugees from Hawks' 1952 *Monkey Business*, a dark comedy about aging, and their roles here represent elaborations of their former cartoon-like characters. Piggy is even rendered via Lorelei's vision as a literal cartoon diamond—an image of sparkling, ageless stone superimposed over his ancient hogshead countenance.

While Dorothy falls for Malone,

Lorelei gets Piggy to give her a diamond tiara belonging to his wife. (the snooty Lady Beekman, the film's only villain). Their worlds collide when Malone takes a snapshot of Piggy embracing Lorelei and Dorothy discovers that he's a detective. This leads to the farcical retrieval of his film by both women, which occasions the line quoted above and ends with Malone stripped of his jacket and trousers and dispatched in a pink bathrobe... After a shopping spree in Paris, Dorothy and Lorelei are confronted by Malone, Lady Beekman and a lawyer demanding the tiara back. Lorelei refuses, insisting it was a gift, and Malone alienates Dorothy further by getting Gus' father to cancel the letter of credit.

The movie's least effective, most conventional number comes when the heroines find themselves penniless in a Paris café. For once Dorothy, who starts the number, takes the upper hand in asserting its meaning, which is essentially social rather than narcissistic, with a crowd of working-class Parisians making up their sympathetic audience. Lorelei's problem with Gus hasn't yet been focused by his presence, so in effect her role in the song has more to do with her sympathy for Dorothy's romantic plight. Lorelei dominates only when there's money to be had: here there is none, so she briefly assumes Dorothy's populist identity—dilutes her sexuality with community values and uncharacteristically becomes 'one of the people'.

'... Until now, the look of the spectator has been that of someone lying prone and buried, walled up in the darkness and receiving cinematic nourishment rather in the way that a patient is fed intravenously. Here... I am on an enormous balcony, I move effortlessly within the field's range, I freely pick out what interests me, in a word, I begin to be surrounded...'

—Roland Barthes,
'On CinemaScope' (1954)

Considering Barthes' quasi-Bazinian response to CinemaScope as a cinema of choice, the frequent misremembering of *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* as anamorphic suggests an unconscious perception of a movie whose 'binocular vision' (Barthes' phrase in the article quoted) proposes two separate points of entry at almost every stage. Seen through Dorothy's lens, it is a world of warmth and good fellowship; from Lorelei's angle, it is a world of cold objects to be possessed. Superimposing both angles, Hawks creates a confusing yet reassuring panorama in which men who are cold fish desire to be possessed as warm objects, and women are friendly, narcissistic predators who bring this about. If we try to determine which woman is smarter, the film offers only contradictory signals. Lorelei spouts malapropisms and steals the tiara thoughtlessly, but is a brilliant strategist; Dorothy seems practical, but falls for a faceless lunk with no prospects and

'Ain't There Anyone Here for Love?'



unconcernedly defends an amoral thief.

Barthes saw CinemaScope as the vehicle for an 'ideal *Potemkin*, where you could finally join hands with the insurgents, share the same light, and experience the tragic [Odessa] steps in their fullest force . . . The balcony of History is ready.' In contrast to this, he bemoaned the Mythology of *The Robe*, neglecting to note any incompatibility between one's ability to scan the latter and the rapid montage making *Potemkin* possible. In so far as the 'stretched-out frontality' of Monroe and Russell is seen only from the balcony of Mythology, the binocular vision of *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* is no less incomplete. Add dialectics, class struggle and the politics of spectacle as assault—three of the linchpins of *Potemkin*—and the picture becomes fuller, more worthy of being seen from the balcony of History as well: a 50s debate on the virtues of hoarding versus sharing. The film honours both, but there's no question which it finds sexier—unless the sharing is strictly between Lorelei and Dorothy, as in the first and last shots.

5TH NUMBER (AND REPRISE):

Diamonds are a Girl's Best Friend

The movie offers two climaxes, on a stage and in a courtroom, with a version of the song performed by each heroine. Both exhibit Hawks' unsentimental fascination with excess, visible elsewhere in his handling of violence (*Scarface*), death (*The Big Sleep*, *Land of the Pharoahs*), youth and age (*Monkey Business*), as well as in the first and third numbers here. Lorelei's version is the better remembered, for it voices her ultimate dark statement in the most opulent manner possible; it is also Monroe's best-known number. Framed by two encounters with Gus, and intercut with three shots of him at his cabaret table, it comprises as much of a personal affront to him as 'Bye Bye Baby'; although this time, at least, it represents an honest one.

Green curtains, part to reveal a flaming orange-red set (recalling the costumes in 'Little Rock'), dominated by a chandelier bearing bound, smiling women posed as statues holding candelabra; around them waltz couples in formal dress. Lorelei, initially unnoticed in her pink evening dress, arrives at screen centre, dripping with diamonds, and repeats 'No' in a mock aria to a group of men clutching valentine hearts the same colour as the decor, snapping at them in turn with a black fan.

The sequence exults in grating contradictions. Lorelei is indirectly dismissing Dorothy along with men, by putting diamonds first, and her main preoccupation is with the ravages of age: 'Men grow cold as girls grow old, and we all lose our charms in the end . . .' In another chorus, she implicitly extols adultery, in sisterly fashion, to a group of women in pink around her—interjecting 'but get that ice or else no dice',

which shatters the hint of Dorothy's communal influence. The dehumanised world that surrounds her is indeed the world of her glamorous imagination, gaudy but petrified, with a grim, deathly profile of pained acquiescence.

In her last chorus, Lorelei snatches one of the diamond straps that the corouselike gentlemen on stage are dutifully dangling and tosses it to Gus at his table—rejecting and demanding diamonds in the same defiant gesture. Gus downs a drink, doesn't applaud the number, and when he appears backstage again he's ready to end their engagement. But to round off the reversal, Dorothy has by now persuaded Lorelei to go to work on Gus to extract the \$15,000 needed to replace the missing tiara (which has mysteriously vanished), and Lorelei has already confessed, 'I really do love Gus . . . there's not another millionaire in the world with such a gentle disposition.' An expert calculator, Lorelei estimates that getting the money from Gus will take an hour and forty-five minutes, and while she ushers him in with 'Daddy', Dorothy goes off with geldames to impersonate Lorelei in court.

She enters in ermines, flashes some leg to borrow time, and finally breaks into an impromptu 'Diamonds'—stripping off her furs to reveal her flashy showgirl outfit and proceeding through a burlesque parody of Lorelei that's every bit as devastating as Lorelei's earlier self-parody. The men in the courtroom quickly change into a leering, clapping audience as she plays to each of them in turn, until the judge (Marcel Dalio) finally succeeds in restoring order. By that time, the vulgarity of her bump-and-grind and the reactions to it have tarnished Lorelei's appeal as decisively as Dorothy's expediency has compromised her own. In one fell swoop, Dorothy's social gift becomes demagoguery through Lorelei's influence, and justice promptly collapses.

The best and worst of both characters

have played themselves out. All that remains is the return of the tiara (which Malone traces back to Piggy, after he quits his job to win back Dorothy) and Lorelei's conquest of Gus' father (Taylor Holmes, a wizened geezer out of Preston Sturges). Both scenes reduce the plot to a charade by giving us 'logical' steps that lead in a perfect circle. The tiara gets ceremoniously passed from Piggy to Malone to Dorothy-as-Lorelei to judge to lawyer and back to Piggy again; and Lorelei uses the same technique on Gus' father that she has already practised on Gus himself—while the question of how brainy she actually is gets passed through a few more contradictory, jokey exchanges.

FINAL REPRISSES:

'Little Rock' and 'Diamonds'

'Remember, honey, on your wedding day, it's all right to say yes.'

—Dorothy to Lorelei

Dressed in virginal white and carrying matching bouquets, Lorelei and Dorothy sing 'Little Rock' with a revised conclusion as they grandly march down steps and the aisle to their grooms. While the camera pans from (1) Dorothy looking from her diamond ring to Malone to (2) Lorelei looking from her diamond ring to Gus and (3) back to Dorothy and Lorelei together, looking at us, a heavenly mixed chorus offscreen reminds us that 'Square-cut or pear-shape, these rocks don't lose their shape'—implying that the disparate demands of humanism and capitalism, community and narcissism, can be finally met when the perfect circle becomes a wedding ring. But the last sly look of glancing complicity between Dorothy and Lorelei suggests that they have collectively sold us a bill of goods, an impossible object; a CinemaScope of the mind, a capitalist *Potemkin*. ■

The final shot: Reid, Russell, Monroe and Noonan facing the camera.





Nostalgia.

THE NOSTALGIA

PETER GREEN

For Gatsby it was the green light across the water, 'the orgastic future that year by year recedes before us', that eluded his grasp. Gatsby believed in the green light and the possibility of turning back time, of repeating the past, or allowing it to take another, more desirable course. For him everything seemed possible: the realisation of an unfulfilled dream of life, shaped to his own design. But Gatsby's life ended in a deserted swimming pool.

Domenico in *Nostalgia* also believes in the need to create a new world. His goal, however, is not the realisation of a personal realm, but a change in the values of the world. Stationed on the scaffolding about the equestrian statue of Marcus Aurelius, he proclaims the need to return to that point in history where we took the wrong path, and to begin again. But Domenico preaches to a

Andrei Tarkovsky, the Russian director whose last two films, *Stalker* (1979), made in Estonia, and *Nostalgia* (1983), made in Italy, are discussed in this article, is preparing a new film, *Sacrifice*, which will shortly start shooting in Sweden. *Sacrifice*, which is to be financed by among others Channel 4 and the Swedish Film Institute, deals with a familiar Tarkovskian theme: the responsibility of the individual for events in the world at large. It begins, in the director's words, with an act of devastating absurdity.

mad world, and he takes his own life with a can of petrol and a lighter to the strains of Beethoven and Schiller's Ode to Joy (Freedom). At the same time, Andrei fulfils Domenico's wish and bears the flame—the lighted candle for St Catherine—across the emptied sulphur baths. Heartsick, he collapses (and dies?) in the steaming pool of the spa. *Nostalgia* as a sickness for another place, another time, so severe as to

amount to a disease—a sickness unto death.

Andrei has come to Italy in search of information on an eighteenth century Russian composer who has been here before him. He encounters Domenico. Domenico proves in many respects to be his alter ego, the film providing numerous allusions to a common identity. In Domenico's dilapidated house the old man pours two drops of oil into the

palm of his hand, indicating how they merge and become one; painted on the wall of his house is the equation $1 + 1 = 1$. Similarly, the Alsatian that suddenly emerges from the bathroom of Andrei's hotel room and settles down beside his bed as if they had been lifelong companions proves, in the realm of reality, to be Domenico's dog. On Domenico's first appearance at the open air sulphur baths the dog appears with him, and it is also present in his derelict house outside the town; and when Domenico goes up in flames, one sees the dog tied to a column, straining at the leash, the only creature in fact to show emotion at his master's death. But the dog also inhabits Andrei's waking dreams, his memories of other places, other times, and is within the ruined church at the close, after death, when they alone are left in the artificial reconstructed landscape and the falling snow of 'home'. The black dog in *Stalker* plays a similar role, its first appearance being just as sudden and mysterious.

This merging of identities is to be found in a number of situations in Tarkovsky's films and in particular in *The Mirror* (1975), where the characters of wife and mother (performed by the same actress) are blurred to the point of identity. In *Nostalghia*, too, Tarkovsky's old preoccupation with his own family history manifests itself anew.

The son of Arseniy Alexandrovitch and Maya Ivanova, Andrei Tarkovsky grew up in a family of two children, whom the mother was left to bring up on her own after the departure of the father. These circumstances correspond to those of the family in the dream sequence of *Nostalghia*, where one sees a woman with two children in a distant,

from Eastern Europe, have a universal significance as well. The search for a physical or spiritual 'home' is not restricted to those countries, and it is one of the greatneses of Tarkovsky's films that they contain all these layers of relevance, extending from the personal, via the national to the universal.

What for example is the yearning of the Stalker for his 'zone' but a nostalgia for the only place in which he feels at home, and where he is nevertheless full of fear? In the story *Roadside Picnic* by Arkadi and Boris Strugatzki, on which *Stalker* is based, the 'zone' is an anonymous realm guarded by future international forces. The meeting place of the scouts and others who are concerned with the exploration of the area is, however, called 'Borstch'. This ambivalence is a conscious element in Tarkovsky's films. They are Russian and yet international, physical and metaphysical, full of both personal and general allusions. Andrei expresses the sentiment that it is necessary to tear down the borders between states; but to identify the destination of his yearnings purely with Russia or any other geographical location would be to amputate the further-reaching dimensions of the film. Home is a place within the heart, a scrap of language and the impossibility of its translation, time past or time future, utopias and, ultimately, paradise.

Domenico lives alone in a dilapidated house in a deserted hill town. For seven years he had held his family prisoner there, and when the police had finally freed them, the son had asked, 'Is this the end of the world?' The captivity of

distance, the Alsatian, Andrei's family descending the hill to the quiet strains of Verdi's Requiem, with which the film also closes. This unreal, sepia world recurs throughout the film, at first strictly separated from the real, coloured world; but the distinction becoming increasingly blurred as the film progresses, the inner world overlapping with the real world of the present. This confusion of the colour/sepia separation provides access to an understanding of Andrei's waking dreams, an insight into the nature of his sickness.

With his young assistant Eugenia, he arrives in a place of pilgrimage where infertile women seek the intercession of the Virgin. Fertility and belief are important themes of the film. Within the church, a heavy figure of the Virgin is borne in by four women. They open the front of her robes and dozens of little birds fly out of her breast, their feathers falling like snow. In Andrei's dream, which is cut in at this point (sepia), a large white feather falls, which he picks up from the mud. Like the Stalker, he has an aberrant patch of white in his hair. Later other dreams of a desired place, a woman in a bedroom, an injured bird on a windowsill, appear; and later still, in Andrei's bedroom, one suddenly sees the bed turned through ninety degrees, the scene now colourless, and a woman—his wife or mother—lying pregnant upon it. Or again, there is a brief trance-like sequence in which Eugenia, translated to the other, sepia world, embraces this woman. So too the

OF THE STALKER

faded, sepia-coloured world of childhood, reminiscent of old photographs from a family album. Time or place are uncertain. The family might be Andrei's own wife and children somewhere else in the present, or his own childhood home of the past, the boy his son or his childhood self, the absent father himself or his own father. These circumstances correspond to those of the family in the dream sequence of *Nostalghia*, where one sees a woman with two children in a distant,

The evidently autobiographical elements that Tarkovsky weaves into his films are reinforced by concrete references: the dedication of *Nostalghia* to the memory of his mother and the quotation from a book of poems by his father (the book being subsequently consumed by flames). Nor for that matter is this the only film in which the director uses his own name for that of the principal character. But Tarkovsky's search for 'home' acquires a broader significance that removes it from the purely personal, introspective realm; and the allusions to autobiographical or national aspirations, which one frequently finds in codified, cryptic form in other films

the family is both home and hell, to which Andrei returns in his waking dreams. He sees himself wandering through the empty streets of this town. They are littered with newspapers, rubbish, old furniture. He passes a wardrobe, pauses and returns to it, opening the mirrored door; but as it swings open, it is not himself he sees there but the reflection of Domenico.

Tarkovsky divides present time, present place from other times and places by means of a sepia/Technicolor contrast. The dimension of memory or dream (or of death or the nostalgia for death) is shot in sepia, the motion of the film slowed, devoid of sound, or at least without the synchronous sounds of footsteps and voices as in reality. The sounds that penetrate the silent world are those of the continuing present, of the circular saw, running water, of the physical realm, and not those of the place where his thoughts dwell. And yet the sounds of the present are inextricably mingled with those of the memory. *Nostalghia* opens upon a misty landscape, a slope down to a lake, a white horse in the

dog inhabits both realms, as one has seen, linking the identities of Domenico and Andrei, and accompanying them both in death.

The small-scale model landscape in the mind's eye in Domenico's house extends out through the open window into the real landscape of the Italian hills. At the end of the film, to the sound of a Russian song, the process is reversed. Andrei and the Alsatian are lying before a pool of water in front of the timber house of his imagination, having arrived in the place of his desires. But as the camera retreats, the reality dissolves and one sees the whole scene, like a stage set, within the ruined nave of a church. Previously, within those same roofless walls, but without the stage set of home, we have seen Andrei, again in a sepia sequence, pacing the grassy nave of the church. In a conversation between St Catherine and God, as Domenico might have heard it, one overhears the saint begging God to make His presence felt to this man, and God replying that He is always present, that the man must make an effort and use his awareness. The final, perhaps most remarkable instance of

this overlapping of spheres, of the blurring of the distinction between the black and white and colour realms of experience, are the scenes in the deserted hill village. Initially, they are depicted in sepia; i.e. in that other time when Domenico had kept his family imprisoned. The colour returns to the pictures, and one sees Andrei leaving the same house in the present, in real time, and driving away in a taxi. But the camera returns to the town again in sepia. This time one sees Andrei walking down the deserted street on his own. It is the moment of his encounter with the reflection of Domenico in the wardrobe mirror. Time present and time past... both perhaps present in time future...

In *Stalker* Tarkovsky also divides the worlds within and without the 'zone' into colour and sepia images. Here, however, the pattern is reversed. The long opening section of the film in the outside, real world, the preparations for the expedition into the 'zone', are shot without colour. It is only after the three-man party has overcome the hazards of entry and put the long journey on the rail trolley behind them that the film suddenly changes to colour, on their arrival in the 'zone'. Here it is the desired realm that is depicted in colour. The 'zone' is in a sense for the Stalker 'home'; he declares it as such on arriving at the end of the railway line and intimates that there is no return, at least not by the same route, whereupon he sends the trolley back under its own steam in the direction they have come. One hears the sound of a dog(?) howling. The Stalker leaves his two companions, the scientist and the writer, to take possession of his realm again. He lies face down in the deep grass, his arms outstretched, and as the camera pans round, one sees the house, the destination of their pilgrimage. But the route to their goal is a circuitous one, and on the way the Stalker has two brief dreams or visions, in which the photography reverts to sepia; half immersed in water they lie, beneath the surface of which are scarcely distinguishable objects. Polluted streams flow past. A large black dog appears from nowhere and lies watching them. The dog will accompany them on their journey to their goal, to the deserted house, and the room within it where, it is said, all one's wishes may be fulfilled.

Having reached the threshold to this room, however, they are unable or unwilling to proceed further. A discussion ensues on belief, recriminations are levelled, and there is an attempt to destroy the Stalker's realm completely rather than confront its mystery. Finally, the camera recedes across the entire depth of the room, its tiled floor submerged by shallow water. A magical, purifying shower of rain suddenly bursts through the ceiling (as it also does in Domenico's house in *Nostalghia*) and stops again. Together with the dog the three men sit on the threshold of the room. After all their disputes and discussions, after the pleading of the Stalker to save his realm,



Stalker: Outside the room where all wishes may be fulfilled.

the scientist dismantles his bomb and scatters the parts, throwing the fuse section into the room. It lies beneath the water. Two grey fish swim up to inspect it. A dark fluid clouds the water.

The scene reverts to the bar where the men had met at the beginning. The photography reverts to sepia tones. The Stalker has returned from the 'zone', together with the dog. The Stalker's wife comes to take him home. He is exhausted. For a moment, as he goes down the road with her, his crippled daughter on his shoulders, the pictures are again in colour. His wife helps him to bed. In a monologue she tells of her life with him, of his periods in prison for illegally entering the 'zone', which had remained his realm, his home, the place of belief or the place of death.

The final colour sequences of the film provide a closing frame-like construction. As at the beginning, one hears a train approaching in the distance. The whole house begins to shake. The glasses on the table rattle and move across the surface. The daughter rests her face on the tabletop. A glass falls off, as if she had caused it to move by some unseen power. Over the roar of the passing train one can just distinguish the strains of Beethoven's 9th Symphony, which have subsided by the time the train recedes.

If the colour/sepia code is used consistently (and in *Nostalghia* we have seen that it is deliberately confused), the brief colour scenes at the end of *Stalker* would indicate that the crippled daughter and perhaps even the wife had at last entered the 'zone', found a place of inner peace and contentment, in the room at the end of the journey, where one's wishes are granted.

Andrei Roublev perhaps provides further evidence on this point. The film is in black and white throughout. Only in the

final sequence, when this other Andrei, the icon painter, has finally revoked his vows of silence and begins to paint again, does the film turn to colour, in the glory of his frescoes and icons, where he finds his way back to the realm of creation; in these final shots of the faces of the Madonna and Christ and the angels—accompanied by the sound of running water and a roll of thunder—the water pouring down the face of the wall and horses grazing in the rain, the crowning use of colour is like an apotheosis.

It is possible to see the 'zone' as a place of terror or as the home of one's dreams, the barriers about it keeping one out or in; nostalgia for another time, another place—a polluted zone, or ideal realm, dreams of childhood or death. Tarkovsky allows us all these meanings in the complexity of his vision.

THE PAINTERLY EYE

Visually and aurally, *Nostalghia* is a multi-layered film. Music is used extremely sparingly, not as an atmospheric background, but as a specific pointing of a scene. The soundtrack is a carefully considered aural composition of noises near and far, past and present—the crunching of glass underfoot, the sounds of water running, dripping, echoing, the distant cuckoo in *Stalker*, or the constant whine of the circular saw in *Nostalghia*—that overlap and link present and past, reality and vision. The aural iconography is as dense as the visual (water, fire, horses, the dog, places of ruin and dilapidation, spilt milk, etc).

The music is the music of mourning (Verdi's Requiem), or of joy and freedom (Beethoven's 9th Symphony), or the brief strains of a Russian folk song. Visually and aurally the films have a rigour and



Nostalgia: Domenico (Erland Josephson) and his companion.

inner logic which suggest that no picture, no sound is a matter of chance. The thunderstorm, the bursting of the sun through the mists, however much they may appear as splendidly spontaneous moments, are as deliberately staged as the white horse in the background. Tarkovsky has developed his own 'montage of attractions'. Frame for frame the pictures are like carefully composed paintings, with almost imperceptible movements and subtly changing light: the still life scene in Domenico's house; the objects, framed pictures and mirrors, openings in walls; the head of Eugenia like a Renaissance portrait in the dim light of the hotel room; the hill town rising up like an ideal city in an Italian landscape; the walls themselves as backgrounds, selected for their textures, colours, light and shade.

The painterly quality of the pictures is striking in all his films, but in *Nostalgia* Tarkovsky goes beyond the creation of mere fascinating visual images. He employs iconographic codes and conventions from Renaissance and earlier painting, systems of attributes and symbols that were a familiar language of painting in the past, and often a chiaroscuro form of lighting. In the scenes in Domenico's house, for example, he underlines the discussion of belief with vanitas elements in the best tradition of still life painting, carefully selecting and arranging objects in various stages of decay in a metonymical representation of the transience of life. In *Stalker* one finds parallels to this in the rotting cars and the tokens of dilapidation and ruin.

In a similar way his citation of objects or of the four elements is often directly related to the conventions of painting. Implicit to wine, bread and oil were obvious religious overtones. Other objects

(water jugs, candles, bowls, books, dead game, fish, birds, etc) were incorporated in mythological or Biblical depictions, or formed the basis of still lifes and represented certain ideal qualities. Bowls, towels, fish, for example, were symbols of water; candles or conflagrations, of fire. The four elements were in turn tokens of other qualities, water representing purification; fire, light and (divine) enlightenment.

In all Tarkovsky's films the four elements are quoted, but in none of them in quite such an associative and painterly manner as in *Nostalgia*. Water and fire are given particular emphasis here, there being at least ten distinct manifestations of the former in this film*. The manner and context in which these references are made leaves little room for doubt that they are used with a consciousness of the traditions of painting.

THE QUEST FOR BELIEF

Belief is a theme central to both *Stalker* and *Nostalgia*. In the former film, the writer arrives at the designated meeting place before setting out on the expedition into the 'zone'. He engages in a discussion on belief and miracles with the woman who has driven him there. He argues that all phenomena are now explicable in scientific terms, that there is no room any more for exceptions to natural law. Significantly enough, the third member of the party is a scientist ('not a chemist, more a physicist'), a professor with a bomb in his rucksack, which he risks his life to recover, having inadvertently left it behind on their way to their goal.

On their roundabout route they overcome seemingly insuperable obstacles and dangers, and yet on the threshold to

the room that is the goal of their journey, no one has the will to go on. They avoid a confrontation with the mystery they have come so far to experience, indulging instead in procrastinations on belief. The promise of fulfilment of one's wishes becomes a trial of belief in itself, and neither the writer nor the scientist is prepared to put his belief or lack of belief to the test, the author taking refuge in recriminations, the *Stalker* heaping abuse on the intellectuals, and the scientist reaching for his bomb to destroy all question of a metaphysical dimension. No one should see the mystery; no one believe in it, no one should come after them. The *Stalker* tries to wrest the bomb from the scientist. It is the *Stalker*, the only one not allowed to see the phenomenon, who is the ultimate guardian of belief, who pleads with the author to throw away his revolver, as useless anyway, and who struggles with the professor to prevent him detonating his bomb and destroying the mystery. The intellectuals are incapable or unwilling to venture an encounter with the mystery and subject themselves to a possible revelation (change or disillusion), despite the trials they have undergone, and even though it might provide the author with an incomparable wealth of material and the scientist with an ultimate scientific insight. Without belief, the object or phenomenon does not exist.

The same idea recurs in *Nostalgia*. The voice in the ruined nave of the church replies that only with an openness, a willingness to see, can He become manifest. Or when Eugenia enters the church at the beginning, she encounters the verger, who tells her to open herself to God, to kneel in prayer; but she is unable to kneel. Andrei's discussions with Domenico revolve about belief; and his final act in carrying out Domenico's wish and bearing a lighted candle across the emptied basin of the bath is an act of belief on behalf of a friend. But where does this quest lead; and in what is it an expression of faith; in God, in Russia, in home, a yearning for childhood? There are sufficient indications of all these things; and yet the nostalgia of the *Stalker* and Andrei is a search for paradise—not necessarily a paradise lost, but a utopia yet to be attained, in life, or after death.

In *Roadside Picnic* the scout or *Stalker* remarks that the further one penetrates into the 'zone' the closer one comes to heaven. In the context of the

*The lake at the bottom of the hill and the mists of the sepia landscape of home; the water into which the white feather falls; the pouring rain through the bedroom window; the steaming sulphur baths; the storm in Domenico's house, the rain falling through the roof, the pools of water on the floor, the splashing of the rain; the absence of water in Eugenia's bedroom, causing her to wash her hair in Andrei's bathroom; the submerged church; the hosing down of the hotel courtyard; the almost empty spa pool being cleaned out, which Andrei crosses with the candle; and finally the lake from home, now reduced to a small pool in the nave of the ruined church.

book this is an ambiguous statement, with the meaning being placed on the dangers to life involved in entering the 'zone'. The film, however, reveals a number of significant shifts of emphasis. Whereas the illegal expeditions into the 'zone' in the book have as their aim the salvaging of material objects left behind from a possible visit from space, Tarkovsky removes all concrete evidence of such a visit. His 'zone' is a guarded area, in which there are no physical artifacts from another world. There is merely an atmosphere of menace. What has happened there is uncertain, shrouded in mystery; a meteorite or flying saucer has fallen, or 'something of the kind'; and whereas the Stalker of the book finally encounters the mystical object at the heart of the 'zone' that is allegedly capable of granting any wish—a golden sphere—Tarkovsky wisely avoids all physical manifestations of this phenomenon. The three men turn back on the threshold of the room without seeing it.

In his commentary to *Roadside Picnic*, Stanislaw Lem sees the golden sphere and its property of fulfilling desires as a naive device. In the physical world of the 'picnic' that is true. It is a breach of natural laws in a physical world. But Tarkovsky turns his world into an inward, metaphysical one, where a metaphysical object would have its validity; and he proceeds to place it even further from our grasp, by allowing no one to see it, removing the certainty of a godlike existence from the realm of verifiable experience to that of belief. Tired of taking a circuitous but allegedly safer route to their goal, the author defies the Stalker's warnings and approaches the house directly. A short



Nostalgia: Eugenia (Domiziana Giordano).

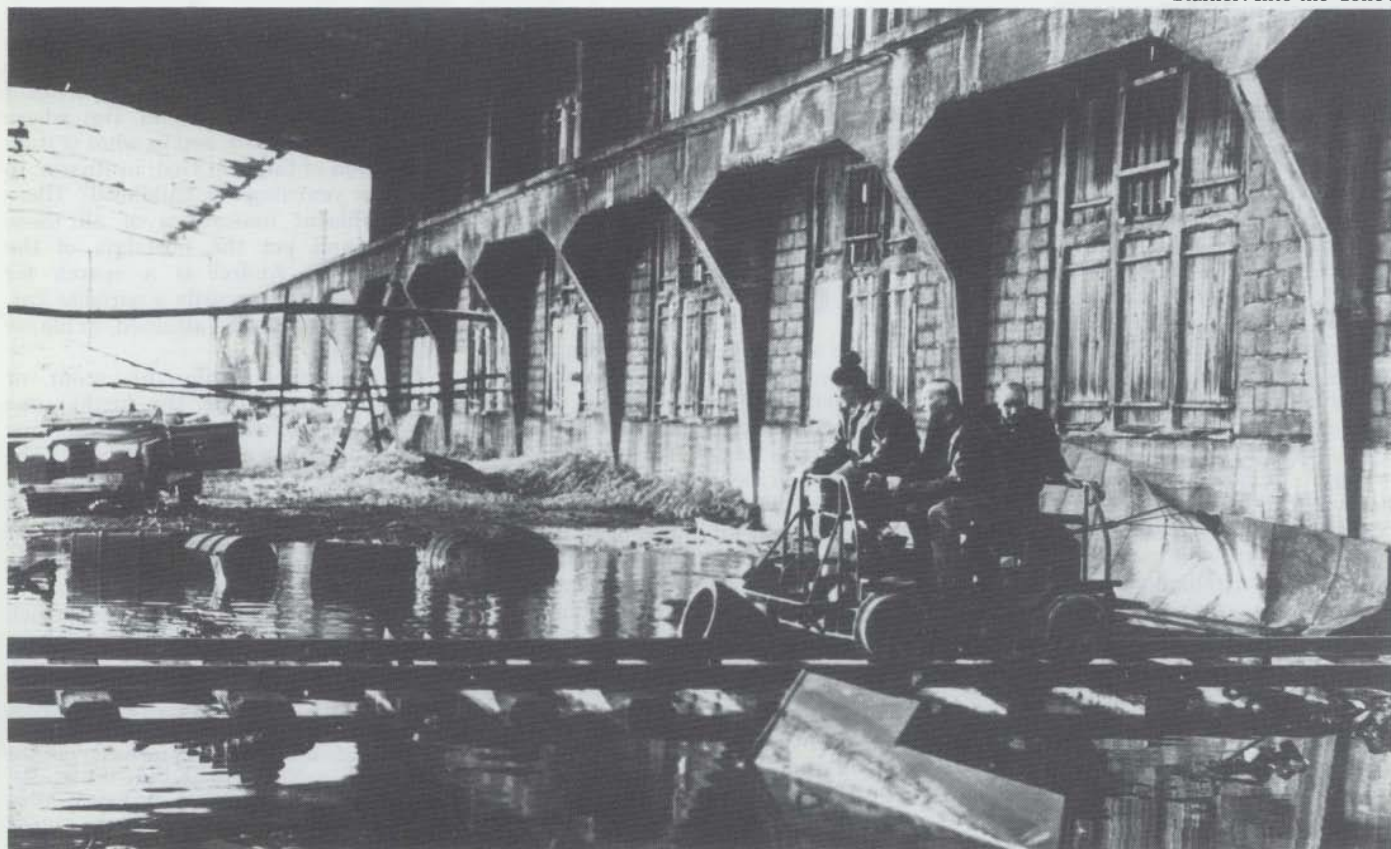
distance from the apparently deserted building he hears a voice forbidding him to come closer, whereupon he retreats and rejoins his companions. What at first seems an exception, a concrete manifestation of a presence in the 'zone', is immediately undermined by the Stalker, who provides a natural explanation for the occurrence, suggesting that the author, afraid in his own heart to go on, yet ashamed to turn back, had spoken to himself in order to resolve his dilemma.

The film pursues a path that skirts hazardously close to hocus pocus or schoolboy adventure, but that finally rises above these dangers, transcends the world of science fiction and, given the belief of the observer, attains a

metaphysical plane. In *Roadside Picnic* three distinct expeditions into the 'zone' are described, the third of which Lem compares with a 'black fairy tale', in which obstacles have to be overcome; and it is this realm that is closest to Tarkovsky's *Stalker*. The film becomes an allegory of a quest for belief, of belief itself.

What was in the central room? Nothing without belief. One recalls the dialogue in the nave of the ruined church in *Nostalgia*, when the voice of God remarks that one must open oneself to hear His words. Is the Stalker a Charon ferrying his tourists across the Styx, through the various circles of hell to the realm of the dead, or an Apostle, a Christ-like figure, a guide to paradise? ■

Stalker: Into the 'zone'.



9 to 5 All the President's Men Angel Atlantic City Bad Timing Billy Connolly Bites Yer Bum Blow Out Breaking Away Britannia Hospital Brief Encounter Catch 22
Chant of Jimmy Blacksmith Chinatown The Conversation Coma Cutters Way Daddy Long Legs Equus Fitzcarraldo Gallipoli Hammett Heatwave Island of Dr Moreau
Kagemusha Last Concert Lenny Bruce—Live M.A.S.H. The Moon in the Gutter Ordinary People Parallax View Repulsion Reds Secret Policeman's Ball Psycho
They Shoot Horses, Don't They? The Bandits Yol 48 Hours A Kind of Loving A Night at the Opera Abigail's Party Nuts in May Under Fire Aguirre—Wrath of God
Cities All Quiet on the Western Front Alphaville American Friend An Unmarried Woman



—EXCHANGE VALUE— VIDEO —CLUB—

Bob Marley and The Wailers—Legend Brief Encounter Cabinet of Dr Caligari
Cries and Whispers Day of the Triffids Deer Hunter Deliverance Magic Flute Diva Dog Day Afternoon Draughtsman's Contract Duel Birds
Eating Raoul Elephant Man Eraserhead Farewell My Lovely Fawcett Towers—The Germans Fawcett Towers—The Psychiatrist Fear Eats The Soul French Connection Atomic Cafe
French Lieutenant's Woman Gandhi Godfather Pts 1 & 2 Gorky Park Gregory's Girl Harder They Come High Noon Kluge Knife in the Water Kramer vs Kramer La Ronde
La Traviata Lavender Hill Mob Life of Brian Local Hero Long Good Friday Look Back in Anger Maltese Falcon Marriage of Maria Braun Mephisto Metropolis Missing
M. Hulot's Holiday Mutiny on the Bounty Newsfront Norma Rae Nosferatu—Symphony of Horror Once Upon A Time In The West One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest Paris, Texas
Querelle Ready Steady Go Vol 1 Rigoletto Salvatore Guiliano Silkwood Stroszek Third Man Trading Places Woyzek Year of Living Dangerously Battle of Algiers

This club offers you the best of both renting or buying:

Rental — view and return

Just send a £20 returnable deposit and a £4 hire fee and you can rent any of our extensive library of films for a week.

Buying — build yourself a library

Every member gets a Special Offer catalogue from which they can buy videos at often half price or under. The first Special Offer catalogue contains over 50 titles ranging from *Reds* to *The Lavender Hill Mob*.

The Exchange Value Video Club catalogue contains a unique mix of the best of Hollywood (both classic and cult movies), continental films from Fassbinder to Jacques Tati, and specialist films from a wide range of areas including campaigning political videos; opera, new wave and rock music and health. Plus all the best available television programming which is worth seeing again on video: with over 200

titles available now, these videos provide entertainment you can just sit and watch or documentaries that you'll end up arguing over with your friends.

To join all you have to do is order one of the titles listed above or send for our free catalogue using the form below.

If you join now, you can take advantage of the £5 introductory voucher below and the chance to win one of five cassettes. Then you get a newsletter keeping you informed of the regular addition of new titles and occasional questionnaires seeking your opinions on what you'd like to see included.

Of special interest to readers of Sight & Sound: Paris, Texas; Return of Martin Guerre; Company of Wolves; Another Country; Under Fire; classics from Andrzej Wajda to Werner Herzog and documentaries on John Grierson and Paul Rotha.

Please return this form to:
The Exchange Value Video Club (Dept SS), Nacton, Ipswich IP10 0JZ.

**TWO GREAT
FREE OFFERS**

1 A £5 voucher to spend on your first cassette.

2 A chance to win one of five videos (tick your choice below)



- ☐ Please send me free your full catalogue.
☐ I would like to rent (VHS only):
☐ I enclose a £24 cheque payable to Exchange Value Video Club. I understand my £20 deposit is returnable if I return the video in good working order.
☐ I would like to take part in your prize draw. If I win please send me the following prize: ☐ Reds. ☐ Chinatown. ☐ The Conversation. ☐ Chariots of Fire. ☐ Ordinary People.
The prize draw will take place on 1 February '85

Name
Address*

*Only available to UK residents

The third seminar arranged by the Austrian literary and cultural magazine *Morgen* at Ottenstein Castle in Lower Austria last July was devoted to the work of the Austrian film-maker Ferry Radax.

Born in Vienna in 1932, Radax has been making films since the mid-50s, his first complete work being the experimental film *Mosaik im Vertrauen*, made in 1955 in collaboration with Peter Kubelka. The Ottenstein seminar provided an opportunity to see a number of Radax's films, chosen and introduced by the director himself, in roughly chronological order, starting with the surrealist black and white film *Sonne Halt! (Sun Stand Still!)*, 1959–62, set in a wintry Italian resort, Monterosso al Mare. This was followed by *Am Rand (On the Edge)*, 1961–63, also in black and white, a long, cool stare at the beatnik scene in Europe in the early 60s. Already these early films bear the imprint of Radax's technical skill and individuality. Their style reflects the period in which they were made, but there is nothing facile or ingratiating, no uneasy glances at what is fashionable or trendy. An element of surprise is always present, keeping the audience alert and assuring that there is not a chance of subsiding into the lethargy which tends to accompany all too many 'predictable' films.

In the wake of the early experimental films, which still retained a freshness not common in their particular genre, there followed a number of biographical films. The documentary style of Ferry Radax is far removed from the usual carefully arranged snatches of interviews following each other like beads on a string. He varies his approach constantly, mixing conventional frames with shots where, for example, only the top of the head of the person speaking is visible, a trick which makes the audience pay even greater attention to what is really being said.

In *Hundertwasser*, 1965–66, colour, the painter is shown, through penetrating shots of his paintings and almost banal snapshots of himself, as a rather whimsical and reserved man, whose art seems to emanate from some inner need for expression. Eccentrics and loners, or at any rate individualists, fascinate Radax, to judge by the subjects chosen for portraiture. His personal friend, the Austrian author Konrad Bayer, whose last days and suicide are reconstructed in *Konrad Bayer, oder die Welt bin ich und das ist meine Sache (Konrad Bayer, or I am the world and that is my business)*, 1968–69, black and white, appears at first glance to have been extremely gregarious and outgoing, surrounding himself with a bevy of female admirers. On closer inspection, however, this rather vain young man stands revealed as a lonely stranger, tormented by feelings of inadequacy. In the film characters from his own literary works are fighting over his soul while his last girl friend, played by herself, tells of the circumstances of his demise in a halting monotone.

In *Drei Tage (Three Days)*, 1970, black and white, the Austrian author Thomas Bernhard is presented sitting on a white bench in a Hamburg park, straight as a poker, unsmiling, pinned down like a butterfly, a specimen for our scrutiny. He sometimes crosses or uncrosses his legs; otherwise only the camera moves, uneasily, vying for a better angle. We hear his voice throughout the film, a monologue about his life and works, and see him sitting on his bench, sometimes in long shot, sometimes in close-up, our

view from time to time obstructed by the camera crew moving equipment in and out of the frame. The result is an overpowering impression of a man with a message, who, like an oracle, pronounces his opinions from his vantage point.

The poet Wolfgang Koeppen, on the other hand, a shy, retiring man, is shown strolling in his beloved Venice in the colour film *Wolfgang Koeppen, ich bin gern in Venedig warum (Wolfgang Koeppen, I like to be in Venice why)*, 1979. There are no close-ups, no direct

Ferry Radax at Ottenstein Castle

Catharina Blomberg



shots showing his face, and we don't see him speaking although his running commentary on the scenes we are shown, intermingled with personal reminiscences, is heard in voice-over throughout the film. Koeppen is being shadowed, however, by the 'Spirit of Venice', as it were, in the shape of a masked *cavaliere* of the eighteenth century. This elegant, dominoed figure, tilting his head like an actor in a Noh play to allow the light and shade to play on the bird-like mask, listening silently

to Koeppen's monologue, becomes a link between the audience and the poet, our ally in the attempt to grasp what he is telling us about Venice and about himself.

One of the most enigmatic philosophers of this century is portrayed in *Ludwig Wittgenstein*, 1975. Radax used the possibilities of colour television to their utmost in this film, which was made for West German Television in two 58-minute parts. With the help of the 'blue-box' technique and other gadgets,

the spectator finds himself thrown headlong into the medium, and in the many simultaneous dimensions of split-screen and superimpositions of images one catches at least occasional glimpses of what may have been the 'real' Wittgenstein. The interviews with eminent scholars illustrate even their inability to grasp or fully explain what Wittgenstein meant by his cryptic philosophical statements. We are however brought to some understanding of Wittgenstein the man, a desperately unhappy odd man out, never completely at ease with his colleagues and friends.

Another *tour de force* is the portrait of James Joyce, *Wer sind Sie, Mr Joyce?* (*Who are you, Mr Joyce?*), 1981, also in colour. As full of surprises as the other Radax films, this work is set in Zürich, where the amiable ghost of Joyce himself is our mentor in a highly entertaining exposé of his life, work and ideas. The scholars and literary historians are allowed their say, but the last word is reserved for the slightly tipsy and bellicose Joyce himself, a tragic, but not pathetic, figure.

The Ottenstein gathering consisted largely of writers, hence the literary emphasis. The last film shown turned out to be the *clou* of the week's screenings, in spite of the very powerful Wittgenstein and Joyce films. *Capri—Musik die sich entfernt* (*Capri—music which recedes*), 1983, is a full-length (108 mins) feature in colour. Based on documentary material and on the books by Norman Douglas, especially *Looking Back*, this is an attempt to explain something of the fascination which the isle of Capri has held for foreign visitors, whether writers, painters, eccentrics or ordinary tourists, during the centuries. Hans Christian Andersen, Lenin and Oscar Wilde all spent some time in Capri, and we meet many of the more or less illustrious visitors in the film. Emperor Tiberius is shown chopping wood, the favourite pastime of the exiled Kaiser Wilhelm. Axel Munthe, the hypnotic doctor, and the painter Kopisch, rediscoverer of the Blue Grotto, are forever part of the Capri scene, and even the misanthropic Nietzsche makes his appearance in a cameo performance by Radax himself. Time and space, fact and fiction, are inextricably mixed, there are breathtakingly beautiful views of the island, and the musical score is a most successful blend of early twentieth century musical styles where strains reminiscent of Delius, Satie, Debussy and Stravinsky are discernible. Nothing turns out to be what it seems to be, there are several *doppelgänger* and the climax is highly bizarre.

His technical skill and superb eye for detail, as well as a highly developed sense of proportion, make Ferry Radax one of the more interesting film-makers in Europe today. During his career of nearly three decades he has never stagnated, never repeated a successful trick, but always moved on, eager to put new ideas into practice. What is even more important, the man has a sense of humour. ■



Capri—Musik die sich entfernt: Aimee and Saidee, rich Texan friends of Count Fersen. A scene shot in their castle.

John van Dreeen, who plays Norman Douglas, at the writer's tomb.

Cameraman Rüdiger Laske, Ferry Radax's collaborator for twelve years, with Radax, playing Nietzsche.





Louisiana Story: Robert Flaherty and his unit.

The White Man's Burden

The Example of Robert Flaherty

BRIAN WINSTON

'My God, John, you don't realise it, but some people starve in this world . . . '— 'That's what I've been trying to tell you, you stupid old bastard, for twenty years.'

Thus John Grierson remembers, in a not entirely untypical self-serving way, the moment, some time in 1939, when he witnessed this first glimmer of social consciousness in the mind of Robert Flaherty. That the glimmer never came to illuminate the man or his work is well known and, when coupled with his equally famous propensity for reconstruction of a most extreme kind, creates an established critical view. This view has for decades done battle with another opinion which sees Flaherty as the father of the documentary, the prime 'poet' of the cinema, a genius and a prophet, above all such attacks. Against this rhetoric the critics have had little success, and the received view of

Flaherty in 1984, the centenary of his birth, remains laudatory. The recent and still growing realisation that even the most non-interventionist of direct cinema documentaries is highly mediated has helped Flaherty's reputation; carping about reconstruction and selectivity seems more and more to imply nothing but a naive and jejune view as to the definition of documentary. Partisans of Flaherty have taken advantage of the growing confusion disingenuously to claim that his films are not documentaries at all—which deeply unserious ploy requires, at the very least, that they all be extensively repackaged.

The problem of mounting a critique of Flaherty is symbolised by the frontispiece of *Robert Flaherty: A Biography*, written by Paul Rotha in the late 50s but only now edited by Jay Ruby and pub-

lished for the first time (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984). The man, aged 65, sits atop a steamer trunk on the porch of a clapboard house, creepers and foliage in the foreground, meditating over a pipe. The white hair is sparse, the shirt loose, the pose, one hand on knee and the other holding pipe to mouth, that of a sailor home from the sea. It is, indeed, an ancient mariner, an explorer, a looker into the souls of men.

Such language comes easily when one is dealing with Flaherty. It's contagious, caught from the Flaherty literature, not least from this most valuable addition to that literature. There is a sort of foreword by St John Gogarty: 'The man I am writing about does me good to meet. It would do you good, too, merely to see him; a big expansive man with a face florid with enthusiasm and eyes as clear as the Northern ice.' Rotha's own text begins: 'Let a giant among men and a sultan of storytellers speak first.' It finishes by quoting e. e. cummings: 'He was a God among men.'*

We are here in the presence of the blarney, extensive, sustained and assiduously cultivated blarney, initially stemming from Flaherty himself and subsequently maintained by his family and friends. One needs must step back, acknowledging (if necessary) his divinity among men but asking, nevertheless, how was he among film-makers? And the answer, to which this book provides conclusive evidence, must be not very good. Indeed, one can go further and argue that Flaherty's influence—his

*All quotations in this article are from *Robert Flaherty: A Biography*.

choice of and attitude to his subjects, above all his manner of working—casts a pall over the entire documentary tradition and is among the major factors in documentary's flawed methodological and theoretical foundations.

Flaherty's was an imperial career—a career almost entirely spent in the far-flung corners of empire or domestic backwaters, in the pay of governments or exploitative commercial interests. The mystery is how untainted he remains by this—as if the cinema were too puny, its pantheon too insecure, to support the vicissitudes suffered by other imperial artists, Kipling, say. Flaherty's explorer stance, although remarked on, is deemed to be without import. It is not even defended (as is Leni Riefenstahl's fascism); it is ignored. And no mistake must be made about this, for he was not a man to rise above his time.

His career as a prospector, in the years before the First World War, was encouraged by Sir William Mackenzie—in Flaherty's words, 'the Cecil Rhodes of Canada.' Flaherty was a child of the last age of imperial expansion, and beneath the veneer of sympathy and understanding for the peoples he filmed there is only the strong whiff of paternalism and prejudice. The clowning with the record in *Nanook of the North* is no accident. For the BBC in 1949 Flaherty recalled: 'The white man has a way of expression. His face reveals so much to a native. He can read your face like a book, while his face remains impassive . . . "How old would you think it would be?" I asked him [an Inuit, Nero]. "Oh," he says, "maybe a t'ousand years." "How would you know it's a thousand years old?" "Oh," he says, "I see it when I am a small boy." A thousand years doesn't mean anything to an Eskimo.' What it might mean in his own tongue casts no shadow over Flaherty's understanding of this all too typical incident.

In every part of the world, Flaherty found similar objects of study. Maggie Dirrane, the star of *Man of Aran*, 'was a wonderful character. She was the poorest of the poor and a great believer in fairies.' 'They [the Cajuns] were imaginative, poetical, a race of storytellers who would describe to you the depredations of werewolves.' 'He [Flaherty] talks with the leisurely determination that reminds one that he has spent most of his life making himself understood in the more primitive parts of the world.'

After his marriage, the filming trips became family outings: no bad thing of itself, but it set Flaherty's life style in a particularly imperial mould. 'The expedition to Polynesia consisted of Flaherty, his wife, their three small daughters with a red-haired Irish nursemaid . . . 'With Flaherty [on Aran] were his wife, their three daughters . . . They settled in the best house on the island, rented from a Mrs Sharman who owned it but lived in London.' 'Wide publicity heralded Flaherty's arrival in India. He dined with the viceroy, Lord Willingdon . . . His Highness [the Maharajah of Mysore] owned a royal zoo and offered to place at Flaherty's disposal a

large and historic unused palace in which to live.' (The offer was accepted.)

Flaherty, who was 32 when America entered the First World War, and therefore not an impressionable soul when these expeditions began a decade later, was encouraged by all this in a certain view of himself. 'When making *Moana*, he had cultivated the idea that the islanders on Savaii should regard him as the Big White Chief. Only if they revered him and respected him could he get them to do what he wanted.' And herein lies the problem. It is not that the man failed to exhibit late twentieth century sensitivities towards native peoples (though, if he had, it would have been nice); rather, it is that he allowed his own lordly view of himself to condition whatever project was at hand. It is not that the films are faked, but that they are faked in such a cause.

There is a sort of unrepentance about Flaherty which is galling. Allakariallak (who played Nanook) dying within years of the film's release; the revival, on the body of Ta'avale (*Moana*), of the dead ceremony of tattooing; Maggie Dirrane being dragged from the sea by her hair in *Man of Aran*; the elephant stepping on the baby in *Elephant Boy*; all these incidents raise the spectre of Flaherty's impact on the lives he filmed and his own sense of responsibility for them. On the evidence of this biography, that sense was attenuated. He writes from India to his boss, Korda, 'Please do not mention the incident of the baby to the press. I have already been accused of trying to drown a boatload of wild Irishmen on Aran!' (The baby was unhurt.)

Nowhere was the blarney more in evidence than in the setting up of these movies. He told the Polynesians that he had made *Nanook* because, 'Love overflowed in his heart for the people of that country, on account of their kindness and their bravery, and also on account of them receiving him well, and because they look very happy every day of their lives in a life most difficult to live in the whole world.' It is to Flaherty that the documentary tradition owes the notion of the divine right of film-makers. Of the

Documentary's elder statesman.



Aran islanders, he said: 'I should have been shot for what I asked these superb people to do for the film, for the enormous risks I exposed them to, and all for the sake of a keg of porter and five pounds apiece. But they were so intensely proud of the fact that they had been chosen to act in a film which might be shown all over the world that there was nothing they wouldn't do to make it a success.'

Even if we reach the sophisticated point of not worrying about reconstruction and fakery, some of us are going to care a great deal about Flaherty's treatment of his subjects and what that treatment has meant in the documentary tradition. In consequence, we will be increasingly unable to take much pleasure, aesthetic or otherwise, from his films. Others are going to continue to care less.

The Rotha biography gives eloquent testimony to another aspect of Flaherty's bequest to the documentary movement, one less vexed morally but perhaps of greater significance: his work style. Within the Flaherty myth, his film-making methods have been compared to those of Inuit carvers. Rotha explains how the Inuit, according to Edmund Carpenter, sees the piece of ivory as hiding the sculpture within so that the form is not created but released. Rotha comments: 'We believe that these two Eskimo qualities—the acute power of observation and the letting of material shape its own meaning—form an integral part of Flaherty's art as a filmmaker.' But, it must be said, what might well work for ivory looks all too much like the monkeys trying to type *Hamlet* when applied to a pile of film cans.

Flaherty, for all that he had the most wonderful eye, never seems to have understood how films are made and never really found any alternative to the normative practices of which he remained in ignorance. It was as if *Nanook*, with its central discovery of how to mould a narrative out of footage and, crucially, titles, was a complete fluke. He never wrote a script; he did not cover scenes; he could not maintain continuity and he never learned to direct dialogue. In addition, he was the most easily distracted of men, wasting days, weeks and months ostensibly becoming acclimatised but often doing no such thing.

'When Flaherty returned to London, it became perfectly clear that although some superb footage had been shot, there was no picture. It was tactfully agreed that Flaherty would not edit the film.' 'The curious thing was that during our association, which lasted for seven months in Berlin, not one foot of film was shot.' 'The summer months of 1923 glided away.' 'Not once did the "actors" use exactly the same words or sentence-formation.' 'My consternation at finding 75,000 ft of apparently unorganised material changed to horror when I learned that there was no story outline or synopsis in the accepted sense.' 'He had shot some marvellous backgrounds. We ran some 17,000 ft of them and, of course, the absence of story was notice-

able.' Flaherty sent us a shot of a man throwing a ball at a pile of ninepins, but he ain't sent us a reverse angle.'

Without a seal hunt, Flaherty seemed lost. For months he searched the caves of Samoa, looking for a great sea creature. On Aran, he made of the peaceful basking shark a prototype *Jaws*. In *Louisiana Story* (a tribute to the beneficence of offshore oil, paid for by Esso), there is of course the alligator. There might be some deep psychological significance in this search for krakens, but it is just as likely that Flaherty, having found in the seal hunt a climax for *Nanook*, simply did not know how to find a climax in anything else. It is not for nothing that he said, 'A film is the longest distance between two points.' For him, with (pre-direct cinema) ratios of 35:1 the norm, this was simply the truth.

Had there been a coherent alternative to the normative rules of continuity, Flaherty's cavalier disdain for them would have been more than acceptable and his place as an important innovator, the man who not only created documentary but freed it from Hollywood editing, would be assured. But the groans with which he routinely accompanied screenings of rushes and the months of toil in the cutting rooms speak to the opposite, to attempts to make the material work in an accepted sense. In sum, his career licenses every slovenly documentary practice, from conning one's way in to having to fix the inchoate mess one has gathered over weeks and months in the cutting room.

Obedience to the rules is, anyway, not the issue here. Rather, it is the extension of the divine right of documentarists from the exploitation of subject matter to the exploitation of producers. Not only does the picture come first but, seemingly, the world also owes the filmmaker a living. The myth has Flaherty as an heroic defender of the individual artist against the seamy barons of commerce. 'Hollywood is like sailing over a sewer in a glass-bottomed boat,' he once said. Yet never once did he deliver a picture on time and on budget. On occasion he delivered no picture at all. This of course is entirely his prerogative as a great artist, but it does somewhat explain the unwillingness of even his friends to give him work. He was virtually unemployable.

If, one can ask, another film-maker, the anthropologist Franz Boas for example, had laid down the benchmarks that the first documentarists were to follow, how might the field look today? Such a speculation points to Flaherty's failures—for one could argue that in a Boasian tradition many of the moral issues and working excesses Flaherty brings with him would be dealt with. One could equally expect that in the Boasian documentary there would be little dramatic storytelling and much more unstructured observational material. Not, to paraphrase David McDougal, so much documentary film but more documentary filming, with a concomitant lack of popularity.

As for Flaherty, we must get out from



'A child of the last age of imperial expansion ...'

under. The contribution remains inviolate, for he was the first to realise the dramatic potential of actuality material and, however mysterious this might seem in the light of his subsequent career, to bring that realisation to the screen. Having said that, one has said it all; for the vision of man in nature looks (at best) like escapist stereotyping nonsense, and the stunning compositions are no longer stunning enough to distract. The man himself, dead since 1951, cannot catch us any more either, with his 'limpid, brilliant blue' eyes. There is no reason to run to the Café Royal, or the Coffee House Club, to hear the 'sultan of storytellers' spin his web. We must free ourselves of the blarney. All that is left are the films. 'In the first place one may not,' wrote Grierson, 'be disrespectful of a great artist and a great teacher.' We are no longer in the first place and disrespect is beside the point. ■

'On Aran, he made of the peaceful basking shark a prototype *Jaws*.'



THE LONDON INTERNATIONAL FILM SCHOOL

*Congratulates past and present students
on the selection of their films for the*

28TH LONDON FILM FESTIVAL

Marwan Al Khafaji	Director	<i>Where the Land Meets the Sky</i> (Great Britain)
Les Blair	Director	<i>Number One</i> (Great Britain)
Mark Forstater	Co-Producer	<i>Number One</i> (Great Britain)
Kevin Dennis	Director	<i>Making Movies</i> (Great Britain)
Marilou Diaz-Abaya	Director	<i>Of the Flesh</i> (Philippines)
Manolo R. Abaya	Photography	<i>Of the Flesh</i> (Philippines)
Mark Forstater	Executive Producer	<i>Not for Publication</i> (USA)
Ann Hui	Director/Screenplay	<i>Love in a Fallen City</i> (Hong Kong)
Ahmed A. Jamal	Director/Screenplay	<i>Majdhar</i> (Great Britain)
Philip Chavannes	Photography	<i>Majdhar</i> (Great Britain)
Mike Leigh	Deviser/Director	<i>Four Days in July</i> (Great Britain)
Joey Pisano	Director	<i>An Italian Tragedy</i> (Great Britain)
Laurens C. Postma	Director/Co-producer	<i>Heaven, Man, Earth</i> (Great Britain)
David Scott	Photography	<i>Heaven, Man, Earth</i> (Great Britain)
Hussein Younis	Editor	<i>Heaven, Man, Earth</i> (Great Britain)
Erika Schmidt	Director	<i>Portrayal of Women in Advertising</i> (Great Britain)
Odd Syse	Director	<i>Remote Control</i> (Great Britain)

THE LONDON INTERNATIONAL FILM SCHOOL LIMITED
24 SHELTON STREET, LONDON WC2H 9HP SH TELEPHONE: 01-836 9642

The empty gaze

Dance with a Stranger

Chris Auty

Amid the gloom and confusions of the so-called British film renaissance, *Dance with a Stranger* (Fox), produced on a modest £1.3m budget and backed by the National Film Finance Corporation, cuts like a comet across the winter sky. Based on the love life of Ruth Ellis, which led her to the hangman's noose in 1955, the film is simply a tale of passion in a frozen climate. But Miranda Richardson's extraordinary performance and Andrew Mollo's luminous design suggest something aspiring to Fassbinder and Michael Powell—a tale of ordinary lives filled with secret passion, of social transgression doomed by social convention.

All of which comes as the most complete surprise, since the documentary basis of the story and the low budget lead you to expect another of Channel 4's talking heads tv movies. Despite the frenzy of his earlier *Bad Blood*, there's little in director Mike Newell's career (*The Awakening*, *Man in the Iron Mask*) to suggest that he would grapple with such dark material. And producer Roger Randall-Cutler's background in advertising promises little more than glossy images. But from the moody fatalism of its opening (Mari Wilson singing Peggy Lee's 'Would You Dance with a Stranger') the film works eloquently in two very different directions. Worming its way back into the 50s, it pictures a London swinging to the Ted Heath orchestra, celebrating British sporting victories with a stiff dedication to glamour which belies the drab realities of postwar life. On the other hand, aesthetically and politically, *Dance with a Stranger* is the contemporary parable of a woman crucified for acting out forbidden desires. Spanning the two moods like some fine steel mesh is the unforgiving fabric of the British class system.

Ruth Ellis was working as manageress of a small Mayfair nightclub when she met public schoolboy and amateur racing driver David Blakely. What follows is a tale of masochism attaining tragic proportions: the drunken, insecure young man without a will to win gradually destroys the life of a vivacious, highly sexual woman who lives alone with her child from a previous love affair. Driven to desperation after a miscarriage, and after endlessly betraying her only supporter, Desmond Cussen (Ian Holm), Ellis shoots Blakely (Rupert Everett) outside a Hampstead pub on Easter Sunday. The last scene records Ellis writing a final, eloquent letter to her lover's mother, assuring her that all has been for the best. On 13 July, three months after the murder, Ellis hangs.

Such a simple synopsis cannot convey



Dance with a Stranger: Miranda Richardson (Ruth Ellis).

the strength of a film which refuses to elaborate unnecessarily on its material. Scripted by playwright Shelagh Delaney (who also gave us *Charlie Bubbles*), the film is a collection of moments, frozen in a stylised past but brought to life by the inevitability of love going wrong. Ian Holm's role, as the dapper nonentity who longs for Ellis and supports her despite the impossibility of love, is one which could only exist in the cinema. He does not reminisce or confess himself. How could he? But from his deft samba to his tickets for the RAC ball, he becomes the model of a certain lonely man entering middle age, and of lower middle-class England latching on to the good life without much hope that it will lead anywhere. While the upper-class boys race their overgrown toys around the circular tracks of the Home Counties, Ruth Ellis and Desmond Cussen dream of lives they will never have. From backstreet abortion to sex across the class barrier, the film portrays 50s England as a dance floor on which all the couples are dancing with strangers to a rhythm which will not change.

It is, however, Miranda Richardson, swinging from professional brightness

through brief bawdiness to trembling desperation, who makes the film gasp and cry. Hair bleached blonde, eyebrows teased, lipstick impeccable, she achieves in her first feature performance what so many British actors have not yet learned—the art of stillness and the empty gaze. From the side of the racing track sipping champagne to the screaming match which finishes her career in Stratford Johns' chintzy little nightclub-cum-brothel, Miranda Richardson is like the ghost of all the passion which never made it into British films because the result might not quite be polite. As such she is a figure to put alongside Anna Karina and Hanna Schygulla in the panorama of European cinema. If only Ruth Ellis could marry her Prince Charming, *Dance with a Stranger* would be a three-hankie weepie. But he isn't charming, marriage is not her fate, and Roger Randall-Cutler's production is tragedy, not melodrama. For Ruth Ellis, who died in 1955, and for her son, who killed himself two years ago, this film is more than an appropriate memorial. It's a requiem to unrequited English passion, and a song of hope for British cinema. □

La tragedia dell'arte

Kaos/Gilbert Adair

There is something almost—I weigh my words carefully—something almost whorish in the emphatically lyrical aesthetics of Paolo and Vittorio Taviani, an undisguised, unrepentant desire not merely to seduce the spectator but to exalt him. Speaking personally, I must admit that the films which mean most to me—to which I return (in my mind) again and again—are those in which one thing alone is beautiful, a single formal or stylistic parameter which contrives to determine, as a symptom rather than a syndrome, my perception of the filmic material in its entirety (e.g. Bresson, Duras, the Straubs). In the Tavianis' work, however, *everything* is beautiful: landscapes are breathtaking; faces are photogenically 'eloquent'; camera movements are flamboyant; compositions are so satisfyingly precise that it is as though space were being cut along the dotted line; and the observation is on occasion so magically larger-than-life as to make the dazed spectator fantasise on emerging from the cinema that nature, too, has seen the film and set out, awkwardly, to reproduce some figure or object which has caught its eye.

Yet if, in shot after shot, scene after scene, they unfailingly strike the gong (as in those fairground 'thermometers' designed to measure a man's physical strength), there is the less happy corollary that one is sometimes too aware of the strain, the sweat. Or, to rephrase that in allegorical terms: with a few images and a few sounds, as with loaves and fishes, the cinema has learned to feed multitudes. But with the Tavianis course follows course to the point of satiety, portions are generous, the fare is exquisitely cooked, and one rises well-satisfied from the table. Except . . . except that one has missed the peculiar charm and aftertaste of a miraculous picnic.

Kaos (Cannon-Gala) consists of four Sicilian tales by Pirandello, completed by an epilogue in which the author himself makes an appearance. The tales are not at all Pirandellian, in the sense in which that qualifier has gained currency (indeed, the sole vaguely 'Pirandellian' aspect of the project is the bizarre double vision of its two creators). Though, on a superficial level, it therefore belongs to one of the most threadbare genres of the Italian cinema—the sketch film—*Kaos* possesses a far greater coherence than we have come to expect from that amiable but usually minor tradition. Not only are the episodes unified by their common authorship (and *auteur*ship), as well as by the fact that all of them have been set among the parched, ungrateful, yet ravishing mountains of Sicily—a crow to whose leg some oafish peasants have fastened a tiny bell relaying the film from tale to

tale; but the characters, in their relationship to the landscape and each other, radiate a genuinely poetic lustre that is the result less of any 'compassion' for them on the directors' part than of a premeditated theatricalisation of the narrative.

Consider the *dramatis personae* in whose company we have been invited to spend 190 minutes of our time. They are predominantly of peasant stock, their roots as firmly implanted in the soil as those of the olive trees which offer them a meagre livelihood. But if Pirandello's gallery of portraits could have been disheartening—with its lunatics, illiterates, hunchbacks, venal landowners and credulous crones—it is rescued from any taint of miserabilism by the film's virtually total rejection of populist sentimentality. The players, it seems, were prompted to syncretise histrionics and hysteria, gestuality in both the Brechtian and the conventionally 'Mediterranean' sense, the Italianisation and the italicisation of posture and facial expression. A young housewife mopping the floor with her feet appears at first to be performing some regional folk-dance; an 'orphaned' mother, tormented by the gibes of her fellow villagers, instinctively assumes the grandiloquent melancholy of a Duse; and saucer-like eyes devour the weatherbeaten faces in which they are sunk. Notwithstanding the airy, often panoramic, imagery, the space thus defined by the Tavianis is essentially a theatrical one; and we as closely approach the *commedia dell'arte*, in a more sombre revision of its cruel humours, as we do Calvino's wonderful published collection of Italian folk-tales.

As though to confirm just such a thesis, the weakest episode is also the least theatrical: *Requiem*, a very Tavianesque account of an impoverished community of shepherds and the low cunning with which they manage to establish a cemetery on their land. *The Jar*, on the other hand, impresses me as a very model of classical story-telling and earthy humour. (It is by far the most familiar of the tales, having lent itself to numerous adaptations in its country of origin and served as the argument for a celebrated ballet with music by Casella and decor by Chirico.) To be sure, there may be a doubt in one's mind as to which of its two leads, the once popular Italian comedy team of Ciccio Ingrassia and Franco Franchi, is the comic and which is the stooge, for they do strike one as a kind of Abbott and Abbott. But, as compensation, one deliciously startling conceit succeeds another: Ingrassia's anguish when confronted with his beloved new olive jar cracked open like a monstrous chocolate Easter egg; or Franchi, from the inside, delicately sewing it all back together; or the weird, ritualised dance of the olive pickers around the jar and its occupant. And, though much grimmer in tone, the remaining two episodes—*The Other Son*, in which a mother is alienated from the most loving of her sons by his uncanny physical resemblance to the rapist who fathered him, and *Moon Sickness*, in which the advances of a young bride are resisted by her lover out of deference to her husband, who happens to be baying convulsively at the full moon—are admirably relieved of any easy melodramatic indulgence in what might be called tragic cuteness.

As for the epilogue, *Conversing With Mother*, it constitutes a moment of sheer grace, as much in the spectator's life as in that of the protagonist. Years after



The Jar: Don Lollo (Ciccio Ingrassia).

his mother's death, at the height of his own Nobelized eminence, Pirandello revisits the family home in Sicily. There he encourages her to speak again, from beyond the grave, of an unforgettable incident in her childhood, one which he has never known how to fictionalise: the family's exile to Malta in the wake of some liberal uprising in 1848; a tiny sailing-boat braving the Mediterranean; a white-precipiced, foam-fringed isle, where the children—as neat, in their underclothes, as a packet of pins—effortlessly slither down a pumice-stone dune into the shallows of the sea.

It is, perhaps, this framework of pure fiction which has made *Kaos*, in spite of

the odd longueur, the Tavianis' most convincing achievement since such early, radical and lean films as *Soversivi* and *Sotto il Segno dello Scorpione*. In any case, one day it surely ought to be worth analysing in detail that aspect of their career which critics have tended to play down: namely, the fact of brothers collaborating so intimately on a film, directing it twice over, so to speak, rather than according to any even stephen division of labour. For what if the 'emphatic lyricism' to which I referred at the beginning of my review should be nothing else than the contemporary cinema's sole example of stereophonic *mise en scène*? □

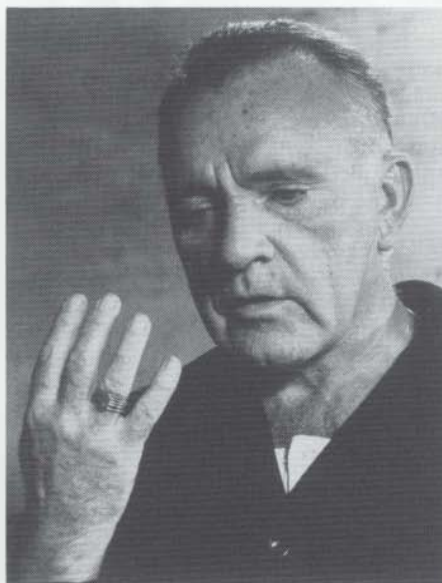
A favourite bedtime story

1984/Jill Forbes

When a Sunday supplement asked her what she was doing for Christmas, Brigid Brophy once replied that she was off to Istanbul so as 'to eat turkey in Turkey'. To judge from the queues outside the cinemas, audiences felt much the same about 'seeing 1984 in 1984'. How right they were. The novel is a wasting asset and, now the year is out, is destined for the literary shelf alongside other Utopias. The film-going public were quick to appreciate that Mike Radford's 1984 (Fox) is definitive in this respect, a coup achieved in the nick of time which no one else can ever pull off.

But how will it look in 1985? It is not an interpretation of Orwell's novel, a '1984 for our times'. It might be argued that plot and characterisation are so flimsy in the original that flights of analysis were out of the question, but the authors' extraordinary—some might say slavish—fidelity to the novel is a deliberate choice, not a *pis aller*. There is a particular pleasure when the washer-woman's song comes in pat on cue or the picture in Mr Charrington's shop falls off the wall to reveal a screen, and it derives from knowing the outcome. Radford's 1984 presupposes a childlike disposition in its audience—a disposition that requires the *exact* repetition of a favourite bedtime story and will not tolerate the slightest departure from the canon. Not enough has been made of 1984 as a classic of juvenile literature (the rats are a case in point), but it has been cleverly identified here.

What this means, however, is that the slightest deviation takes on disproportionate significance, and I confess to a feeling of immense frustration when Winston sits down to write his diary by merely placing himself to the side of the screen instead of hiding in the cunning little nook, calculated to appeal to adolescents, which his room by chance contained. There are also a couple of interpolations of a slightly different order: the boy Winston seeing his mother



O'Brien (Richard Burton).

devoured by rats and the adult Winston's fantasy that Room 101 opens on to fields of wheat. The first is genuinely obtrusive, not as an improbable source for Winston's phobia but because it is an extraordinarily vivid memory for the man who otherwise has to struggle for recall. But if the psychoanalytic mode sits uneasily with the collective amnesia of Oceania, this is really Orwell's problem, not Radford's. Both here and at the end, it must be said that the rats are highly satisfactory. As for Room 101, the image recurs through the film. It is not simply that Winston under torture babbles of green fields; he has, more interestingly, fallen victim to Inner Party propaganda. The Two Minutes' Hate always begins with views of a green and pleasant land that Goldstein has supposedly destroyed, but Winston's vision of paradise is artificially induced and shot in that distinctive yellow light usually reserved for margarine ads, so that it becomes a highly effective and economical statement of what Ingsoc is all about.

The authors' wish to be faithful also extended to the casting. It is known that John Hurt was always central to the producers' conception of the film, and he is made for the part (where is his leg ulcer, though?). Richard Burton's performance is remarkable for being so low key when both the actor's reputation and previous attempts at the role led one to expect more conspicuous charisma. O'Brien, in fact, figures less than might have been imagined, and it would be interesting to know whether this was a result of very tight shooting schedules. However, any film version of 1984 must stand or fall by its Julia, and if the authors considered Orwell's fantasy of a sexpot in a siren suit slightly pathetic they give no hint of it here. Julia is played straight: Susanna Hamilton is neither too young nor too old, too glamorous or too dowdy, and she succeeds in being credible.

Even so, there must only be a limited number of people who will go to 1984 simply to relive their childhood. But the real surprises and the genuine exercise of creative talent come with the design of the film, which is brilliant. Every item in these carefully constructed sets is both familiar and strange. Outdated technology is deployed for very modern kinds of surveillance. It is rather like paying a visit to the Irish Republic and finding that people still smoke 'Craven A': Winston dials an old-fashioned metal telephone of the kind found in Button B call-boxes; the documents he has to revise arrive in suction impelled tubes that department stores once used to send money to the cashier; when the Thought Police want to know what is going on in somebody's apartment, they resort to the crude expedient of flying an ancient helicopter low along the street and peering in through the window. Nor is breakfast television forgotten: simply, Winston is awoken not by a Green Goddess but by an old-style gym mistress complete with divided skirt and whistle.

Radford is trying here to do something more than appeal to the nostalgia (or infantilism) of a certain generation. In 1984 design is a mode of Orwell interpretation. Deconsecrating, re-naming, or changing the function of monuments is more symbolic than their destruction. The Convention knew this and so does Mrs Thatcher (County Hall, it should be said, does not figure). So when familiar London landmarks such as Alexandra Palace, Battersea Power Station and Senate House appear in new guises, London momentarily takes on the appearance of modern Berlin: nothing is quite what it seems, what you remember, or what you learned before. It is too often forgotten that what Orwell describes in 1984 is the English Revolution. Radford has rightly seized on this aspect of the book, but imaginatively and in a way which provides that rare thing: a British film in distinctively English locations. Catch it while you can. □



Full Moon in Paris: Louise (Pascale Ogier) and Octave (Fabrice Luchini).

The grasshopper and the ants

Full Moon in Paris/Tom Milne

There is something at once disarmingly silly and indescribably sad about the youthful heroine of *Full Moon in Paris* (Artificial Eye)—the fourth in Eric Rohmer's series of 'Comedies and Proverbs'—when she blithely announces, having made a certain minor adjustment to her life-style, that she did so because 'the one experience I've missed is solitude'. Having learned to distrust the scenarios Rohmer's characters evolve for themselves without allowing for the benign or inimical influence the world outside their minds will almost certainly elect to exercise, one can already almost see the well of loneliness waiting to swallow the poor girl up.

The problem for Louise (Pascale Ogier) is that she is the grasshopper living with the ant, otherwise known as Rémi (Tchéky Karyo). For her, life begins with Paris and its round of distractions, whereas he, taking himself very seriously as a planner of new towns, feels that it is more fitting to live as a new town suburbanite himself, moreover insisting as a dedicated *sportif* that the disco dancing which is her joy is bad for his tennis. They love each other, *bien sûr*, and it is only with resignation, after a tempestuous little quarrel, that he agrees to her proposal (already set in motion) that she use her former flat in Paris as a pied-à-terre. Not for entertaining other men, just so that she can be by herself from time to time or sleep late after a party without fussing about transport back to the suburbs.

That she is deluding herself is suggested when her friend Octave (Fabrice Luchini) acutely sniffs out the first signs of breakup and seizes the opportunity to press his own suit. That she is nevertheless sincere is indicated, not so much by her rejection of Octave's advances as by the sense of contented

wonderment with which, though only after repeated telephone calls fail to produce a squire for the evening, she discovers the joys of solitude curled up with book and drink on her first solo venture. That she is going to be horribly hoist with her own petard, either way, is evident when a chance encounter in a café and a slice of airy deduction by Octave—a delightful echo of the Sherlock Holmesian game from *La Femme de l'Aviateur*—lets Louise suspect that Rémi is carrying on with her friend Camille (Virginie Thévenet).

The element of marivaudage is obvious, as is the system of farcical symmetries with which the film is conducted (with the first shot, the camera nosing round to discover the door of an apartment block, completed in its circular movement by the last one as Louise walks away from the same door). But although Rohmer's approach is often described as coldly cerebral, nothing could be further from the truth. True, he does pin his characters to some behavioural drawing-board equipped with patterns enabling defections from the norm to be measured and classified. But clearly what fascinates him is the way his specimens indignantly wriggle in self-defence.

There is a marvellous sequence quite early on in *Full Moon in Paris*, very simple in effect but a miracle of precision timing, which provides a structural foundation stone for the plot symmetries while simultaneously blowing the whole thing apart. Octave is dancing with Louise at a party, and the camera remains motionless on them observing a drama evolving with the frame. Octave's attention is attracted by a girl dancing almost out of frame just as we notice a young man (Bastien) dancing behind Louise. A slight shift in rhythm suddenly has Octave now half-partnering the

unseen girl, while Louise gravitates naturally towards Bastien, and his partner (Marianne) is left more or less out in the cold.

The scene is important structurally in that it introduces Bastien (Christian Vadim) long before he enters the plot as Louise falls to temptation and betrays Rémi with him, and Marianne (Anne-Séverine Liotard) long before Rémi falls for her to leave Louise in the lurch. But there is also an insidiously erotic overtone to the scene and its change of partners that speaks volumes about matters to which the characters themselves are deaf. Bastien, for example, is the rough trade type, a sinuously sexy biker. As such he obviously belongs, like the blockily muscular Rémi, to the class of men 'inferior to herself' to whom Octave insists (over her denials) that Louise is fatally attracted. Do we then believe her tearful declaration to Rémi that she slept with Bastien only to punish his defection? Maybe, maybe not. Life isn't that clear-cut, and neither is Louise as she hovers uncertainly between the end of one relationship and the start, possibly, of another.

Further reverberations from this sequence include the fact that Marianne, in partnering Bastien, is invested with a simple sexuality that is very different from Louise's 'ethereal' sophistication, and may well make her (quite apart from the fact that she too is a *sportif*) a more attractive proposition for Rémi. While Octave, passionately in pursuit of that very ethereality, is shown to be barking hopelessly up the wrong tree. According to his own definition he is devotedly married, but the fact that we never see him in company with this object of his devotion, any more than we see the girl who attracts his interest during the dance, suggests that to him the object of desire is less important than the idea. Consequently, in pressing his claims on Louise, he does so with the matter-of-fact subtlety of the casual seducer; and for all his air of eccentric fantasy as a dandy of the cafés, he is hardly likely to make any headway—despite, or possibly because of, Louise's ingenuous insistence that she is invariably attracted to any man irresistibly attracted to her—with a girl clearly in quest of a bruiser with the soul of a poet.

One small complaint, perhaps. For the first time in the series, the proverb ('Qui a deux femmes perd son âme/Qui a deux maisons perd sa raison') seems somewhat inapt in a film where Pascale Ogier's marvellous performance (making her recent untimely death doubly tragic) places her so squarely at its heart. The action, too, is so emotionally exact, so psychologically acute, that it hardly needs the alibi of lunar madness provided by a monologue on nights of the full moon by Laszlo Szabo as an artist encountered in a café. But since that scene is as delightful as all the rest, who's complaining? □

Wind from the East

Red Dawn/Richard Combs

'This is a madhouse,' declares a Cuban commander in *Red Dawn* (UIP) as the resistance of the small Colorado town he and his men have just invaded by parachute continues doggedly into the night. The madness of war is what co-writer and director John Milius presumably meant, though the association that immediately springs to mind is with the antic version of the same plot in *1941*, Steven Spielberg's wonderful, little-esteemed comedy of the American reaction to the threat of invasion in World War II. The comparison is worth pursuing, not just to make it easier to dismiss Milius' film—which posits an invasion of the United States by Cubans and Nicaraguans, and some sixty Russian divisions which have hid themselves across the Bering Straits—as epic nonsense, unintentionally as laughable as Spielberg's. The two films actually look quite similar, from particularities of lighting and shooting style to the way their recreation of small-town Americana seems such a movie-fed vision. (In *1941*, this was the comic point: Capra-and-Disney-land caught up in one of Laurel and Hardy's gags about escalating self-destruction.) The peculiarity, perhaps, is that Milius was executive producer and one of the story writers on *1941*, which lampooned in advance the paranoia of *Red Dawn*. But what Milius and Spielberg share (as temperamentally unaligned siblings of the movie-brat generation) is a double-bind insularity: they are blind to everything but America, and only see it in terms of lovingly recreated movie clichés.

In any other terms, as political prediction or military projection, *Red Dawn* is difficult even to grapple with, for reasons suggested by the quote above from strike force leader Bella (Ron O'Neal). Having set up his outrageous scenario for World War III, Milius immediately insists that we think about it in terms of every other war ever fought in the movies. From his own statements, Milius would evidently welcome the Cold War turning hot, as a 'cleansing fire', the ultimate test of the Right Stuff he's invested in heroes from Dirty Harry to Conan the Barbarian. But if Armageddon is in the offing, it seems a trifle antique, not to say footling, to be drawing our attention to the madness of war. War-movie stereotypes begin cramping the perspectives of the film before the outrageousness (or stupidity) of its premise has had time to find its true scale. It's as if right-wing thinking about the international state of affairs was all drawn from Biggles.

Bella himself is instantly recognisable as the 'good German', trying to fight a decent soldier's war, while the homicidal fanaticism of the Gestapo quivers in the



Red Dawn: The invaders.

cantilevered cheekbones of Vladek Sheybal's Russian overseer Bratchenko. (Another way of seeing it is that the Cubans are to the Russians in this film what the Italians are to the Germans in World War II movies.) It's also given to Bella, as one of those good-bad villains who surreptitiously become the moral focus of their films, to explain the drift of this war and Milius' conception of it. He's disillusioned almost from the word go, claiming that in all the wars he has fought (Nicaragua, El Salvador, Cambodia, Angola, Mexico, to name, as he does, a few), this is the first time he has not been on the side of the insurgents but instead playing the role of oppressor and policeman. It's an interesting formulation, which explains why Milius had to fight this war in the United States itself, because it gives his anti-Communist crusade something of the original purity of the American Revolution, withdrawing it from all those messy foreign involvements (as in *Apocalypse Now*?). And anti-Communism needn't even mean anti-Russian: soon after the takeover, the cinema in the town of Calumet is playing *Alexander Nevsky*, a neat joke since Eisenstein's defence of a nationalist cause in that film could be identified with the American one here; and when the partisans hiding out in the hills above Calumet receive word of how the rest of the war is going, it sounds as if Denver has become the site for another battle of Stalingrad.

Why those partisans all have to be teenagers is not clear, unless it's just another acknowledgment that the *Porky's* and *Star Wars* audience is the

only one left in America. After being shown how to lose their virginity and conquer outer space, why shouldn't they also have a fantasy about saving the world for democracy? In the event, the kids remain a rather amorphous group, difficult to distinguish and transforming themselves in no time into a fearsome guerrilla band, the Wolverines. Wish-fulfilment storytelling is so much the key—as if the kids were not just in the film but making it—that it is difficult even to make sense of the war at an action level. The partisans seem to have all the weapons and skills they need just for the asking, and when the means and tactics of conventional warfare are no longer sufficient to the fantasy, *Star Wars* merchandise is wheeled on (the invaders finally wipe out the Wolverines with huge, futuristic gunships). Milius has also invested these kids with so many of the tough-through-the-tears responses of the action movie (or the 'male weepie' as Raymond Durgnat has called it) that they seem encrusted, virtually monumentalised, in cliché.

But it is not just its wholesale adoption of the clichés of the war movie which renders *Red Dawn* so null and void as a right-wing thesis (and not even particularly effective as red-baiting). It treats the war as such a simple, concrete 'thing', with virtually no ideological aspect, that the thesis—and the narrative—just break down into certain physical preoccupations. Which in a way renders this a non-film, but perhaps also Milius' most personal, deeply felt work. It is basically a huntin', shootin' and fishin' film (the survivalist preoccupations), in which the boys are playing hookey in the woods, under the guidance of their absent—incarcerated—dad (Harry Dean Stanton), while mom (the Russians?) is raising hell back home. Milius' fetish for firearms is also embedded in the film in a disconcertingly 'real' way: the action sequences have no real continuity or interest, but he does know how to make explosions look good.

Through this rather plain, objective style, however, the ghosts of other filmmakers—specialists in related spiritual/physical matters—might be flitting. There's Samuel Fuller in the opening sequence, where the invading paratroops just drop to earth outside the Calumet schoolhouse, combining all the naivety and surrealist shock of Fuller's cinema-direct. There's John Ford in the protective figure of Ben Johnson's old mountain man, and Howard Hawks in all the stuff about manliness and even in the way the kids are scarcely individualised beyond the group. *Red Dawn* could be colour-linked with *Red River* (father-son lore) and *Red Line 7000* (the law of the group, and how to make a film with young, rather faceless folk). Milius' non-thesis is unlikely to disturb anyone's political sensibilities, but through its prism whole areas of American cinema may never look the same again. □

FESTIVAL REPORT

Beyond the South Bank

The new improved London Film Festival is no longer housed almost entirely on the South Bank. The crowds have flowed over Waterloo Bridge and the epicentre is now somewhere in St Martin's Lane; 1984 may therefore be the first year that no 'Disgusted, Islington' accuses Leslie Hardcastle, the NFT's administrator, of personally rigging the ticket allocations—or so the 1984 festival director, Derek Malcolm, hoped.

Geographical dispersal was matched by fragmentation of theme and genre. Instead of a sun and its planets, there was a series of mini-systems: children's films, Thames Silents (actually, only one), new British cinema (mostly tv), Third World films, European art cinema, tv marathons. Some old hands wondered if this would destroy the atmosphere of the festival. Two French visitors were, indeed, overheard complaining that it wasn't a patch on Cannes where the town is taken over by film fever. But then, Cannes needs a film festival and London doesn't. In view of which it is a considerable achievement, in such an enormous city, to have found so many venues within walking distance of each other.

Finding the ordinary filmgoer, the man from the Catford Odeon, can be hard. It seems that everyone attending the festival has a bee in his bonnet or an axe of some kind to grind. But from what could be gathered through random enquiry and observation, the punters know what they like and what they are prepared to spend on it. Result: they will pitch up for almost anything newish that speaks French, e.g. the fairly dreadful *Separate Rooms* (whoever invented this title for *Notre Histoire* got the wrong *histoire*) starring the egregious Nathalie Baye. Their allegiance also extended to Rivette's *L'Amour par Terre*, which struck this reviewer as a not altogether successful remake of *Céline et Julie* with the prurient overtones more familiar in Robbe-Grillet. Nevertheless, public figures spotted in the audience—the editor of a Fleet Street newspaper, the star of a tv sitcom—were, so to speak, riveted, and the fact that they turned up at all is a tribute to the exposure Rivette has received at earlier festivals.

However, the great mistake is to suppose that the majority of the audience are film buffs of this kind. They are not, and it is right that the festival, in order to appeal, should be a 'celebration of cinema, not a collection of art movies'. The esoteric interests of the filmgoers are most entertainingly revealed in the splendid question and answer sessions which, for ten minutes or so, allow individuals to ride their hobby-horses. If NFT audiences are always a bit dotty, this cannot be more true than at the LFF. As a result, Edgardo Cozarinsky became involved in an amicable squabble with a



Camila: Susu Pecoraro.

man who had known Picasso, but no one talked about the remarkable part of his *Jean Cocteau*, namely that the soundtrack was composed entirely of archive material. The audience is made up of sub-cultures and micro-societies: half the Japanese in London turned out for *Antarctica* because one critic described it as 'an oriental *Chariots of Fire*' and fine films with, nevertheless, highly unprepossessing titles, such as Peter Wyeth's admirable *Twelve Views of Kensal House*, were sold out.

Possibly the LFF teaches us more about London than it does about the cinema; certainly, any dream that this could somehow become cinema city for three weeks was always pie in the sky. But if this is true, the question remains as to the sort of festival we should aim for. Apart from British films, which figure as of right, the refusal to premiere the new for its own sake, or to mount retrospectives or systematic genre classifications, condemns (if that is the right word) the festival to an almost uncomfortable eclecticism. Moreover, it is no longer the first and last chance to see many of the films screened: an increasing proportion find a distributor or are bought for television, and this, I would have thought, will gradually increase the pressure to specialise. Like many others, I suspect, I took a gamble on what would not be released and paid it special attention. On this principle, one ends up seeing mainly so-called 'small' films, many of them from the Third World or from countries without strong commercially oriented industries.

Argentina figured prominently, perhaps as a kind of compensation for the war, the film of which has yet to be made. *Argie* is emphatically not that film, unless one is to suppose that the absence of narrative coherence is designed to mirror the hero's disorientation at being caught in London during the Falklands campaign. *Funny Dirty*

Little War is quite another story (nothing to do with the Falklands, despite its title). It's a sort of *Clochmerle* with guns, a hilarious satire on the relations between central and local government, set in the Argentinian provinces, and reminiscent of Comencini in its defence of the little man. But for my money *Camila* was both the most entertaining and the most poignant of the Argentine movies represented; described by one admirer as 'a cross between *Gone With the Wind* and liberation theology', it demonstrates just how Europeanised Argentina is by comparison with neighbouring countries. The heroine is 'corrupted' by foreign novels and the etiquette she flouts is imported from polite society abroad.

The issue of national identity was confronted by Diego Risquez, who eloquently discussed the artistic difficulties of the Latin American director whose vision of the world is entirely conditioned by conquistadorial iconography. His *Orinoko* is a Venezuelan *Birth of a Nation*, incredibly shot on Super-8, which establishes, as the central image for the creation of the nation, a neo-classical arch, set across the Orinoco river, with niches that are incongruously peopled by figures from indigenous mythology. In similar vein, Christian Richard's *The Courage of Others* attempts to rely on the narrative traditions of Burkino Faso (ex-Upper Volta) rather than the conventions of western storytelling. The category 'Third World Cinema' is much too broad to be meaningful, but the films on show here do have something in common, an element which is often missing in films that come from longer-established or more commercially oriented industries: they are all still searching for an adequate film language and they all emphatically refuse the western documentary model.

By contrast, the tribulations of First

World couples seem merely fatuous. *My First Wife* and *Haunted* were both incorrectly persuaded of the interest of the predicaments they dramatised. And when such films are set against those which portray more damaging kinds of disablement—*Annie's Coming Out*, *Beyond Sorrow*, *Beyond Pain*—they begin to seem marginal indeed. Aline Issermann's *Juliette's Fate* only falls into this category as a portrait of an unhappy marriage. But it is mainly a film about the indomitable nature of the human spirit and it draws a stunning performance from Laure Duthilleul as the country girl, stuck with a husband who maltreats her simply in order to save her parents from destitution.

The festival was really much too various for any overall assessment, but it did permit some trend-spotting. The new technologies deliver images of our world in ever greater numbers, and in order to survive the cinema is clearly returning to its ludic and mythological origins. Beginning with *Gremlins* and ending with *The Thief of Bagdad*, the LFF 1984 was thus a kind of genealogy of the medium.

JILL FORBES

L'Amour par Terre

After an unheralded market screening of *L'Amour par Terre* (Cannon-Gala) at Cannes last year, a small Anglo-American group gathered in the midday sunshine to inquire of each other, somewhat anxiously, whether the magic still worked. Six months later, that moment of incredulous shared pleasure has to stand up to sceptical scrutiny. More than any other European director, Rivette is a *cause* to which one is committed—or not, more commonly—and the films but stages of a work interminably in progress: that single film which all great directors endlessly remake. Or perhaps in Rivette's case *unmake*, considering the mythic twelve-hour *Out One*, the reputedly lost negatives of *Spectre* and *L'Amour Fou*, the unreleased *Merry Go Round*, etc . . . To contemplate a new Rivette on straightforward release in France and Britain after a decade of films genuinely *maudits* is to court disillusion and bathos.

First things first. Theatre has always been at the centre of Rivette's cinema. The off-screen *Pericles* of *Paris Nous Appartient* and proscenium frontality of *La Religieuse* foreshadow the full-blown play-within-a-film of *L'Amour Fou*, which increasingly looks like the pivot on which the Rivettian circle turns. *L'Amour par Terre* opens with a conspiratorial audience gathering to watch Geraldine Chaplin and Jane Birkin upstaging each other in a farcical display of domestic '*théâtre-appartement*'. This is indeed theatre 'on the ground' after the classical *Andromaque* of



L'Amour par Terre: Jane Birkin (Emily) and Geraldine Chaplin (Charlotte).

L'Amour Fou: theatre and cinema scaled down for the anodyne age of television? The two jobbing actresses are summoned from their bed-sit existence to the arcane world of Jean-Pierre Kalfon's theatrical chateau, where they are to act out his megalomaniac fantasy. Like the 'house of fiction' into which Berto and Labourier venture as Céline et Julie, Chaplin and Birkin are cast adrift in a script that's being written around and about them, where action and audition become interchangeable and, finally, theatre and cinema fuse into a celebration of the seductive power of fiction.

Not narrative or spectacle—Rivette is always holding back or undercutting these—but an elaborately formal play with the elements of filmic fiction to make us feel 'the weight of the signifier', as he put it back in 1973. Not the story, or the acting, or the ideas, but the *experience* of participation in a lay-ritual. What's new in this turn of the circle is the elaborate filigree of a neo-classical plot and dialogue, all symmetry and *double entendre*; and the presence of a master of ceremonies, in the shape of Laszlo Szabo as Kalfon's butler Virgil, who 'improves' his master's texts while typing them and devotes his leisure to translating *Hamlet* into Finnish. Virgil solemnly but knowingly conducts actors and spectators alike through the labyrinth of plot and passion that provides an excuse for this exercise of fictional manipulation. Pure fiction himself, he is the centre of gravity of the whole comedy.

Céline et Julie won admirers from all sides for its prodigious invention and sparkling performances by Labourier and Berto. *L'Amour par Terre*—another untranslatable title, unless Tom Milne's inspired 'Love Laid Low' catches on—will surprise many by the skill with

which it assimilates the mannerisms of Chaplin and Birkin. Its artifice will still infuriate those who are untouched by Rivette's gut-appeal to the 'theatrical illusion', which sends its victims forth, ever optimistic, to their next encounter.

IAN CHRISTIE

The Brother from Another Planet

'The Brother', the mute, twirly-haired black 'alien' in the latest film from the John Sayles' production line, would have been at home in the witty, gentle, off-beat world of, say, John Carpenter's *Dark Star*. One night this runaway slave plops without explanation into the water near Ellis Island. One foot has been sheared off, but he feels no pain: he is reduced to a slow, disconcerting hop (and Sayles here and elsewhere is quick to turn a moment of horror into a comic routine). In the island's echoing immigration halls, he hears the voices of others who have sought refuge in the New World. Next day, his foot has, lizardlike, grown back and he collects a discarded shoe to hide his clawed, irregular toes. He sets off with an enquiring gaze into Manhattan. With a few deft strokes, Sayles, the writer/director/editor, has engaged both attention and sympathy.

The Brother from Another Planet (Virgin), although it will perhaps be shown on television, could never have been financed by television. It is too irregular, its comic scenes require a concerted attention and even then depend for effect on a spectator with a certain inconsequential turn of mind. The ending, with the besting of a drug merchant, is perhaps too abrupt for its

FESTIVAL REVIEWS



Maria's Lovers: Keith Carradine (the musician) and Nastassja Kinski (Maria).

own good, like those hasty marriages with which Shakespeare sometimes wrapped up his last acts. If the film is to gain an audience, it won't do so at one fell swoop; it requires word-of-mouth. It is unfashionable, lacks a buttonholing insistence. But its tone is all its own and Sayles' taste for dry, throwaway humour just as cherishable as that of the early Bill Forsyth.

The Brother—he ends up in a marvelously laid-back Harlem bar where he's adopted despite his oddities—is it turns out no more out of place in this heterogeneous, white, black, oriental, Mexican city than anyone else. His talent for fixing broken space-invader games (the simple application of his palms acts like balm on the exhausted machines) at once finds him work; but his boss, although at first incredulous that he has no tools, is remarkably incurious. The Brother, however, is curious about everything. On his first day, he sees that to acquire fruit you need money; money comes from cash registers; he can naturally open these simple machines; why is he hounded when he opens the register and offers money? The stab of a previously unknown romantic affection (he's smitten by a kindly, welcoming black singer) is equally perplexing. He accepts both persecution and love, however, with the openness of the true innocent.

Joe Morton plays the Brother with expressive charm, his naturalness heightened by his two robotic, black-clad pursuers (one of whom is the satanic Sayles himself), who although they have mugged up on the American idiom wholly lack their slave's gift for communication and his ability to pass unremarked among the flora and fauna of New York.

JOHN PYM

Maria's Lovers

The keynote is honest simplicity. A soldier, Ivan Bibic, is home from the wars. The railroad running through his town is overlooked by the onion domes of a church. It could be the director Andrei Konchalovsky's native Russia, it happens to be Pennsylvania, in a curious doldrum time just after the end of the Second World War. The boy, a survivor of a Japanese camp, has buried his hurt within himself. Outwardly he's trim, cheerful and in control, eager to see the girl, Maria, the memory of whom has sustained him. The first faces we see are those of the GIs of John Huston's *Let There Be Light*, speaking with that slightly stilted formality of almost forty years ago about the loss of comrades, the longing for home. A Negro, all composure, suddenly stops: the mask cracks, and we feel the stab across the years.

Maria's Lovers (Cannon-Gala) has none of the pumped-up indignation of *Coming Home*, none of the epic grandiloquence of *The Deer Hunter* (though Konchalovsky proved his epic capabilities with *Siberiade*). The characters are, if you like, out of *Cannery Row* rather than *The Grapes of Wrath*: a travelling musician, inured to the rebuffs of barmen, with a lolling bulldog companion; an ebullient older woman with an absent husband who knows just what the returning soldier needs. If we were shown any more of them than we are, they might have become tiresome caricatures. But the film is justly proportioned, its success in no small measure based on such simple matters as the deft establishment of the geography of the town, the pace of its life. Poeticism is dabbed, not daubed on; the desiccated

colour appropriately desaturated.

The difficulty of getting this tonal quality right, of, in a sense, relaxing into the period and the place, is illustrated by another recent, similarly conventional, picture on the Second World War and an American backwater community, *Racing with the Moon*; here the makers also strove for an honest simplicity (in the Hollywood manner), but unlike Konchalovsky and his colleagues, who seem to have been given free rein by Golan-Globus, failed to draw back before a potentially clichéd moment actually became a clichéd moment.

Although several men love her, and this is the lyrical subtext of Konchalovsky and Gerard Brach's script, Maria (Nastassja Kinski) in fact has only one 'lover', the musician, with whom she goes to bed only once, for no particular reason except that he's insistent and she's miserable. She has married Ivan (John Savage), but, so long sustained by the idea of Maria, he cannot accept her reality; he turns brutish and in time leaves. Maria, however, loves her husband, has since childhood, and the heart of the film is about her constancy and how it, together with Ivan's eventual acceptance of the musician's child, finally cracks his mask and frees him from the past. Singularly conventional? Well, yes, and particularly the final scene with Ivan rapturously making love to Maria for the first time. But the whole, despite the occasional false note, has about it an honesty, as well as an unaffected simplicity, which is hard to gainsay.

JOHN PYM

Camila

Since the change of government in Argentina, evidence of similar changes within the film industry is beginning to filter through to European film festivals. Perhaps Maria-Luisa Bemberg's *Camila* can be seen as a sign of the times. Based on a true story set during the tyrannical rule of Juan Manuel De Rosas in the mid-nineteenth century, it tells of the doomed love of Camila O'Gorman, a young Catholic woman from Buenos Aires' high society, and a Jesuit priest, Father Gutierrez. Fleeing from the capital, they find some happiness in a small village but are denounced by a priest and executed with both government and civic consent. This story has a special meaning for Argentinian liberals, since it seems to symbolise not only past repressions, but all the complicity between Church, state and an oppressive patriarchy in more recent times.

Having finally succeeded in getting this taboo subject on to the screen, Maria-Luisa Bemberg treats it in a style that veers between a lyrical celebration of *amour fou* and the more commercial

demands of the tv serial. The political background is sketched in but not fully analysed (not, at least, for a foreign spectator) and the extreme opulence of the period setting, which would not have shamed Visconti, gives it at times a dreamy complacency which often conflicts with the hard realities of the story. Even so, the feeling of two hapless lovers striking out for their independence is conveyed with some force, notably in the early scenes when secret looks are exchanged in church and streets, leading up to an explosion of passion when both decide to flout the 'rules' surrounding them. Their flight and capture are rendered in terms of highly coloured melodrama, complete with rain, wind and looming close-ups. Then, towards the end, the tone darkens into realistic tragedy as the couple are removed from their cells, carried into a dank courtyard and shot, with the bright reds of the soldiers' uniforms cutting across the image like a pool of blood. It could be objected that the tinkly, emphatic music score (harking back to Francis Lai) unnecessarily softens the images, as does the incessantly diffused lighting and sun effects which also appear to have been borrowed from European sources.

Apart from this, the shooting style, precise, mobile and zoomless, urges the narrative along with a nice feeling for the look of hot, fussy interiors, dusty roads and bustling streets. All the faces have a period consistency, and the two leads, Susú Pecoraro and Imanol Arias, communicate a genuine sensuality, the latter having some of the attributes of a young Montand or Belmondo.

JOHN GILLET

My First Wife

The opening of Paul Cox's new film, like that of its predecessor, *Man of Flowers*, is literally operatic. Music from Gluck's *Orpheus and Eurydice* accompanies the elaborate exploration of a darkened house and eventual discovery of a couple in the throes of passion. We are then introduced to John, the central character (John Hargreaves): the Gluck excerpt is part of a radio programme he is presenting and, in what seems to be a reference *à clef*, he quotes the composer's belief in putting poetry at the service of subject matter. This, at any rate, is what Cox does. He does not, however, follow through on the bravura opening, choosing rather to concentrate on the human predicament.

The couple we have glimpsed prove to be John's wife Helen (Wendy Hughes) and her lover. Later, as husband and wife lie sleeplessly side by side, a remorseless two-shot records the moment of truth when she declares their ten-year marriage can't continue and he obsessively refuses to accept the judgment.

The milieu, that of the comfortably off middle-class intelligentsia, has often been the target of facile satire. But not so here: Cox, a former documentarist, has a sharp eye for detail, and he treats the components of bedroom comedy as the stuff of agonising reality. The 'well-made' plot gives way to an open-ended examination of John's growing masochism, which leads to an attempted suicide that by a kind of blackmail brings his wife back to him.

Yet the achievement of *My First Wife* (Enterprise), luminously shot by the director's regular collaborator Yuri Sokol, is that, in some respects, it is a comedy. The credibility gap that yawns between John's awareness of his predicament and his inability to come to terms with it is appalling yet often irresistibly funny. The scene, for example, in which he forces his way after his wife into the home of her parents (exemplary cameos by Charles Tingwell and Betty Lucas), where attempts are made to calm the intruder with coffee, brandy, something to eat, and eventually his father-in-law's hapless proposal of a man-to-man talk, becomes hysterical in the popular as well as the proper sense of the word. Like the gentle, understated *Lonely Hearts*, this abrasive, calculatedly overwrought movie uncovers the extraordinary in the ordinary.

Cox underlines his preoccupation with the everyday by the periodic insertion of optically treated scenes of city life: boats leaving harbour, passers-by, a child playing with a dog. Mingled with these (and Cox was an experimental filmmaker before he was a documentarist) are disorienting shots of trains rushing through the night. This motif, stated in the fatalistic views of trains which back the credits, is resolved when John lies in bed after his suicide attempt, the window beside him framing a busy railway line: demons of the night objectified.

TIM PULLEINE

Success Is the Best Revenge

Cocteau somewhere writes of coming across, in a gift catalogue, an article which was categorised only, and obscurely, as *a difficult object to pick up*. Jerzy Skolimowski's *Success Is the Best Revenge* is just such an object (and, indeed, has scarcely been 'picked up' for distribution in this or any country). Multifaceted, prismatic, polygonal, centrifugal (where *Moonlighting*, with which it invites obvious comparison, was centripetal)—there exist adjectives aplenty, and eager to be of service, for anyone confining himself to describing the film from the outside; penetrating its elusively diffracted facade is quite another matter, however.

Instead, then, of endeavouring to disentangle its snarl of themes or making sense out of its near-Cubist *découpage* (as in his 60s work, the director likes to rub two shots together, like sticks, to produce a spark), one is tempted to focus on loose, individual particles whose glint has particularly registered in the memory: Jane Asher's Thatcher-toned bank manager or the encounter with a supposedly non-violent Rastafarian or the film's absolutely letter-perfect depiction of a crabbed and constipated UK, with cars eternally revving up just outside one's front door, jets eternally buzzing over one's head, labourers eternally rummaging, like archaeologists, underneath the streets of London (half-enveloped as it is in green tarpaulin, as though part of a monstrous 'wrapping' project by Christo), pigeons in abundance like tiny strutting Frenchmen, their Légion d'Honneur rosettes pinned to their breasts, and supermarket exits as nerve-wracking as airport customs halls. Skolimowski the minimalist, of course, suggests a fairly inconceivable hypothesis, but *Success Is the Best Revenge* was shot in what might be called his 'maximalist' manner, and perhaps there is simply too much—too many facets, too many ideas, too much incident—to be comfortably packed into the film's 91-minute running (or running, jumping and standing still) time.

Yet the spectator's comfort was no doubt foreign to the brief which Skolimowski set himself. His film can be compared, in a way, to one of those brain-teasers, that popular children's puzzle, for instance, which comprises sixteen little squares but only fifteen little tiles to fill them; the idea is to slide the tiles back and forward around the constantly shifting empty square until an image takes shape. Here the empty square is Poland. The theatre director Rodak (Michael York, an unmistakable Skolimowski proxy) has exiled himself from Poland, but he is no less cut off from his country of adoption, from its rites, its values, its language. And this sense of double statelessness is visited upon his son ('Michael Lyndon', a pseudonym of the director's own son), who nevertheless contrives an ambiguous act of resistance: pawning the expensive camera which was his father's birthday present to him, streaking both his face and hair in poignant punk splendour, he flies off to Warsaw, 'the first of the Mohicans' to confront that sad, straight-laced city.

A mercurial, over-brilliant flibbertigibbet of a film, maybe; but in its intelligence, its timeliness, its sheer fidgety dazzle (it might have been titled 'Sunlighting'), a lesson to everyone in the British cinema and *a difficult object to put down*.

GILBERT ADAIR

Stop press: The film has now been taken for distribution by the BFI.

Park's Parnassus

LEARNING TO DREAM:

The New British Cinema by James Park

Faber and Faber/£3.25 (paper)

James Park's argument is set out boldly enough in his first sentence: 'The history of British cinema has been one of unparalleled mediocrity.' But he detects a renaissance—or perhaps a naissance, which would do—with the work of such directors as Radford, Christian, Temple, Gilbert, Forsyth, Douglas, O'Connor, Kanievska, Petit, Greenaway, Joffé, Jarman, Jordan, James Scott and, to some extent, Frears and Eyre.

It is worth quoting this more or less complete list, since the passports to the upper slopes of Parnassus are issued with some care. Amongst those still milling about at base camp are expatriates such as Apted, Newell, Roddam, Ridley Scott and even Parker, who, though quoted approvingly, sadly has failed the 'personal vision' test. Then there are those competent practitioners such as Loach, whose work is found wanting for being so concerned with parochial or social issues that it fails to attend to 'the full use of the film medium.' Compromises with American or international commercialism, or a commitment to the domestic, the quotidian, or the small change of social politics, all serve as veils which drop damagingly between the real film-maker, his vision, and the full use of the medium.

Not to conceal an interest, it had better be faced that there are yet other practitioners who are still queuing patiently at the consulate for visas. They are responsible for 'films such as Claude Whatham's *The Captain's Doll*, Gavin Millar's *Weather in the Streets* and Michael Lindsay-Hogg's *Doctor Fischer of Geneva*,' which 'derive their style more from the BBC's traditional concern with costume drama than from the aesthetics of cinema.' Without wishing for a moment to defend any of those three pieces of work, it seems symptomatic that they can be listed without reference to D. H. Lawrence, Rosamond Lehmann or Graham Greene.

The book discusses the prospects for this new cinema and is informative about the routes into the industry found by the new directors. It is also usefully realistic about the funding and revenue of cinema, unsupported by television, cable-sales or govern-

ment. The gloomy situation described by Park has since deteriorated even further. He acknowledges the relative failure of the campaign by the Association of Independent Producers to enlist government aid. Recent moves by the Thatcher government have squashed even those pious hopes. If the infant new film culture glimpsed by Park is to survive, it will have to do so on the bare mountain.

The question is, how much do short studies such as this one help to nurture it? Though Park pays more than lip-service to the idea of collaboration (there is even a chapter with that title), the book's argument is largely illustrated by interviews with the listed names above, all directors, with the addition of a few comments from one writer (Andrew Birkin) and a few producers (David Puttnam, Al Clarke among them). Park is describing an *auteurist* cinema in which the director is not only the 'lynch-pin', as he puts it, but the only voice; and not only that, but a voice which must report from 'the furthest reaches of fantasy and extremes of passion', whither it has gone to see visions and dream dreams.

It is of course a description of one kind of cinema, and one that has thrown up some durable masterpieces. I would put Bill Douglas' trilogy amongst them. But Bill, personally unassuming but fierce in the defence of his own wee bit of territory, would be the last immodestly to claim that all cinema could or should aspire to the chamber-intensity of *My Childhood*, *My Ain Folk* and *My Way Home*. Nor can one detect any unity in either processes or aims amongst the Parnassians. Park, having made a brave stand, gathers the lads around his argument protectively, despite their politely expressed desires to head off every which way but James'. Thus it has to be that Peter Yates only 'reached his creative peak when he came back to London to make *The Dresser*'. Thus it is that Douglas' properly expressed plea for a bit more imagination—'it seems that some of the new film-makers have finally learnt to dream'—becomes the catchword of the book and a code by which to judge all.

But the culprit is television, an enemy of promise lambasted on every page. Consider the following: 'Films such as Marek Kanievska's *Another Country*, Julien Temple's *Absolute Beginners*, Michael Radford's *1984*, Roland Joffé's *The Killing Fields* and Pat O'Connor's *Cal* all contribute to a serious debate about the future of Britain and the world.' In a book of muddled generalisations, this takes some beating. Not that it might not be true, for what it is worth. It is

simply that it is worth nothing. Those five admirable film-makers have nothing discernible in common, nor do the films, in style or content (in so far as it is possible to judge: I reserve my judgment on *Absolute Beginners* since it hasn't started shooting yet).

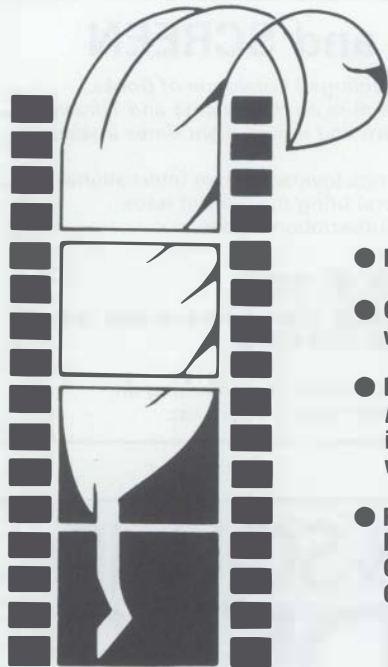
Kanievska is encouraged by the flattering demands of *auteur* purism to consider that he has turned 'Julian Mitchell's stage-play' (no mention of his screenplay) from a gentle critique of the public school system into a passionate attack on the establishment. Radford might well feel that his worthy attempt to be faithful to the book merits at least some more grateful mention of Orwell from Park—perhaps as a collaborator. O'Connor is a passionate admirer of Bernard Mac Laverty's novel and, one supposes, his screenplay too. Joffé's story has many documented sources, and it may be that of all these heterogeneous five *The Killing Fields* will be seen to have required the firmest directorial control, in the sense of mastering the multiple contributions of ideas and skills and keeping the tip of the foresight on the bull, and not the bullshit. The suspicion grows that what unites these five on the page is that they are not tv movies.

The fact is that making films is

both simpler and more complicated than James Park's enthusiastic war-cry implies. Simple, because it doesn't always require visitation by divine afflatus. Complicated, because a film is the beneficiary as well as the victim of countless skills and failures. Park contrasts the listless processes of tv with real film-making. 'A central challenge for the film-maker is to find a way of using the camera to express the film's main themes.' What on earth does he think people do when they make television films? When Stephen Frears accepts a tenth of the budget and a quarter of the time to do a tv movie, does he apologetically only offer a quarter of his talent? Is *The Hit* necessarily a finer thing than *Sunset Across the Bay*?

There are things to be said about the drawbacks of tv movies: quality of image and sound, reception (not production), amount of money, time and so on. There are tendencies for tv to be drawn to the matter-of-fact and conformist as against the visionary and the disruptive, for banal and obvious reasons. But you cannot erect out of such problems an aesthetic platform on which to build an ivory tower, still less invite only some of a very talented bunch of people to live in it.

GAVIN MILLAR



- Prizes of £15,000
- Open to Amateur writers under 26
- Last year's winner, *Restless Natives*, now in post-production with Thorn-EMI
- For full details write to:
PO Box 156
Oxford Film Foundation
Oxford

The LLOYDS BANK NATIONAL SCREENWRITING COMPETITION

Cutting to God

TRAVELS IN GREENELAND:

The Cinema of Graham Greene

by Quentin Falk

Quartet Books/£14.95

There have been sixteen feature films based on Graham Greene's novels since *Orient Express* (based on *Stamboul Train*) in 1933, and many others taken from his short stories, as well as television adaptations. Some of these have had screenplays by Greene himself but most have not, and he has also written an original screenplay (*The Third Man*) and adapted Bernard Shaw (*St Joan*). The list of actors over these fifty years is impressive, as are the directors: Carol Reed, John Ford, George Cukor, Fritz Lang, Otto Preminger, among others. Yet the total effect is disappointing and, mainly, forgettable. Greene himself says, 'My works don't in fact make good films.'

Naturally Quentin Falk is not so dismissive of his subject, who has, he points out, been adapted

for the cinema more than any other writer, including Alistair Maclean and Harold Robbins. The strength of Falk's book is in its detailed, anecdotal anatomising of failure, leavened by the author's generosity, tellingly interwoven with some wonderful quotations from Greene, from actors, directors and producers, and from reviewers of the time. One feels able to assess the films one has not seen. One also wonders what that acerbic 1930s film critic of the *Spectator*, Graham Greene, would have made of them all.

The book's weaknesses lie in two areas: the scanty treatment of Greene's own life and novels, and the sketchy analysis of inter-relationships between the screen adaptations of his work. The book adopts the most obvious structure—a chronological discussion of each film—and Greene's life away from the cinema is only a shadowy presence despite the fact that so many of his books are so closely based on his travels. In a work about a novelist whom many regard as worthy of a Nobel Prize, there is too little attention to Greene's deeper concerns and obsessions.

It seems that Greene's pervasive exploration of Catholicism, which produces both tortured believable characters and 'angst-ridden

ciphers', to quote Falk, and his use of subjective narration, together work against film adaptations, at least with the directors his work has attracted. Guy Elms, who collaborated with Greene on the screenplay of *The Stranger's Hand*, told him once: 'You're a bit like a British documentary. When they are in any doubt, they cut to God. Can you please avoid cutting to God?' And Greene himself, speaking of his last screenplay in 1967, for *The Comedians*, comments that, 'My biggest problem when adapting one of my own novels... is that one cannot tell a story from a single point of view of one character in a film as one can in a novel.' John Huston's recent failure with *Under the Volcano* was chiefly on this count, though Satyajit Ray's *Home and the World* shows that it can be done, to a very considerable extent.

This could suggest that, at his most interesting, Greene's attitude to the world is so intensely his own that it cannot be publicly shared in a medium like cinema, but only in private communion, or sometimes confessional, with a reader. Film-makers have been lured by his settings, which are generally exotic and often violent, by his plots, which are strong and coherent, and by his characters, 'white men going to seed in outlandish places—unshaven, guilt-ridden, on the bottle,' as Greene puts it. But perhaps this is all elaborate distraction from the real Greenland in Greene's head. Very few of the films have captured the psychology convincingly; the specially written *Third Man* is probably most successful on this count. The confrontation with film-making, and with Hollywood in particular, nevertheless makes an absorbing, often hilarious case-book, starting with the fact that Selznick wanted *The Third Man* called *A Night in Vienna*.

Brighton Rock, with screenplay by Greene and Rattigan, was one of the more sensitive examples, but it is not much of a film compared to the novel. Greene says: '*Brighton Rock* was written in such a way that people could plausibly imagine Pinkie went to hell, but then I cast doubt upon it in the ending. In fact, I wanted to throw doubt on hell altogether. I am a great believer in purgatory. Purgatory to me makes sense, while hell doesn't.' So Greene's Pinkie operates at a complex theological level. John Boulting, the director, was unhappy about this. 'I think we felt that the Roman Catholic mystical quality did not always ring true as expressed from time to time by Rose and Pinkie. I accepted the idea of it but they were really too articulate.' The censor, a 'highly bigoted old man', certainly did not approve and cut out any references by Pinkie to the Mass. An upset

Greene commented in a newspaper letter: 'Apparently one is allowed a certain latitude in using the name of God as an expletive, but any serious quotation from the Bible is not permissible on the English screen.'

It is intriguing that when Greene was given the chance to tackle a religious subject, the story of Joan of Arc, through Shaw's play, he and Preminger made such a fearful mess of it: all spectacle, with St Joan burnt on screen unlike Shaw, and no psychology or intellectual content. *Time Magazine* described it as having 'turned Shaw into pshaw'. Preminger later admitted having misunderstood Shaw's play, but Greene is apparently unrepentant about his version. It would have been interesting to know why.

ANDREW ROBINSON

Propaganda maestro

JOHN GRIERSON AND THE NATIONAL FILM BOARD:

The Politics of Wartime Propaganda

by Gary Evans

University of Toronto Press/£19.00

'I had spent weeks preparing for our encounter by reading everything I could about the documentary movement,' writes Gary Evans of his first meeting with Grierson at McGill University in 1970. 'Characteristically, he dismissed me brusquely and told me to go read everything I could find about Goebbels. Not only was he testing the hopeful author's threshold of endurance; he was saying that what Goebbels did for the Nazis Grierson and his movement were trying to do for democracy. After reading and digesting hundreds more pages of material, I slowly realised that the Second World War was at least on one level a chess game between the Goebbels and Grierson teams, a game whose winner would determine the alignment of loyalties and nations (perhaps) for centuries to come.'

This is exactly Grierson, the charismatic influence of the man Evans aptly tags 'the propaganda maestro'. Although patently too scholarly and acute to indulge in what he calls the 'near-hagiographical embellishments' of a Forsyth Hardy, Evans was at least on one level got at, because he has taken Grierson's later line on British documentary almost entirely on trust and not in-

STAGE and SCREEN

My revised and enlarged Catalogue of Books, Magazines and Ephemera on the Cinema and Theatre is now titled as above and issued eight times a year.

Two first-class stamps (overseas: two international reply vouchers) bring the current issue and subscription details.

A. E. COX

21 CECIL ROAD, ITCHEN, SOUTHAMPTON SO2 7HX
Tel: 0703-447989

I am always interested in purchasing all out-of-print cinema books, etc.

SIGHT & SOUND BINDERS

Each binder holds 2 years supply, and is covered in blue Balacron with gold lettering.

Price £3.75, £4.95 including p. & p. (\$10.50).



British Film Institute,
Publications and Membership Services,
81 Dean Street, London W1V 6AA

BOOK REVIEWS

vestigated Cavalcanti's argument at all, with the result that his book is unreliable about the British scene.

It is off-putting to read that Grierson's early experimentation with compilation film is 'a little-known fact', or that the British documentary movement 'floundered about' during the war in an 'unsuccessful attempt at inspirational propaganda'. True, Evans cites Humphrey Jennings as an exception to this floundering, but he then asserts that but for his untimely death Jennings 'might have assumed a leading role in reshaping the British documentary film tradition.' Apart from a singular lack of evidence for such an optimistic view of Jennings' future, a reshaping of that kind would have run counter to all Grierson's aims. Jennings was, in Grierson's eyes, a dreaded individualist who condescended to the workers.

Before commenting, even as briefly as he does, on British documentary, Evans should have known such awkward facts. He should also have made himself aware of the far from rapturous feelings that Grierson's rather chilling chess game evoked in some of his original protégés working on in war-torn Britain, whose carefully made films were ruthlessly dismembered to provide odd useful scenes for that huge panorama of international strategy (the monthly series *Canada Carries On* and *The World in Action*) presented in the racy and incisive style initiated by *The March of Time*. Do any of these Canadian films really compare with British effort of the same period? As inspirational compilations harbinging a better world, can any of them equal Paul Rotha's contemporaneous *World of Plenty* and *Land of Promise*? I personally doubt it, and Evans' descriptions do nothing to alter my opinion, but here it is definitely not 'something of an advantage' (as Evans suggests) that his 'main preoccupation is not film.'

Of course Grierson's main preoccupation was not film either, and Evans is on altogether firmer ground with his analysis of the ideas that fuelled Grierson's crusade. 'Here was an individual whose lack of identifying political signature might leave both the ideologue and the polemicist dissatisfied in their compulsion to define.' After tracing the roots of Grierson's philosophy back to his schoolmaster father's nineteenth century dream of education as the key to freedom and forward through the influence of Walter Lippmann, Trotsky, Lenin, Hegel—noting in the meantime the pragmatism that steered him towards government sponsorship and ruled out identification with the Marxist cause, also the faith

that stemmed from a strong Calvinist tradition—Evans quotes from a 1969 interview in the *McGill Reporter* to support the very credible theory that Grierson, at least latterly, considered himself one of 'the elect'. 'Masterminding is a valid activity of the human spirit,' Grierson said, 'and medicine men are worthy of their hire.'

The view of Grierson as a non-religious missionary is one that holds up well from every angle, and Evans looks at it most ways. 'Grierson's use of propaganda went straight to the Catholic origins of the word—*Congregatio de Propaganda Fide*, the College of Propaganda instituted by Pope Urban VIII in the seventeenth century to educate priests for missions. In the modern progressive sense, Grierson wanted to organise a movement to preach, spread, and maintain the doctrine of democracy and to maintain the democratic faith by inspiring the citizenry.' Drawing 'no distinction between propaganda and education', Grierson saw the state as 'the machinery by which the best interests of the people are secured' and believed in being 'totalitarian for the good'.

For a short time in Canada the crusade seemed to be winning. In the field of non-theatrical distribution, 'The two-way process Grierson and the Film Board developed was years ahead of the concept of "global village" which media pundit Marshall McLuhan was later to develop in his explanation of the communications revolution,' Evans claims. Then cold war politics stepped in. Evans' dissection of the maestro's inevitable defeat makes compulsive reading. 'Down the Greased Pole: Practical Politics and Igor Gouzenko Deflate Grierson's Triumph' he heads his best chapter, and I shall stick my neck out and risk proclaiming this not only brilliant but also crammed with little-known facts.

The fascinating thing about crusaders is their ultimate immunity to extinction. As Evans says of the Griersonian stance, 'the effort to reach the ideal is as important as achieving the ideal itself.' In the end 'the dream... has been left intact.' About ten years ago (in *The Rise and Fall of British Documentary*) I recorded much the same reaction to Grierson's endeavour in the 1930s. 'It is less for its actual achievements than for what it attempted and what it stood for, that the British documentary movement is remembered,' I wrote, and I also came to the conclusion that the 'idea' had remained 'virtually intact'. As Evans had almost certainly not read my book, there must be a moral to be drawn from this.

ELIZABETH SUSSEX

FILM

Canada House



CANADA HOUSE CINEMA (Seating for 80) is open to the public every week during October to June. We show a wide range of Canadian films: features, documentaries, animation and experimental films on 35mm and 16mm. We are also fully equipped for video presentations. Check Time Out or City Limits free listings services for details or ring us on 01-629-9492 ext. 243.



CANADA HOUSE FILM LIBRARY is a free service to the public for the loan of Canadian films on 16mm. We carry films on many subjects and have special collections of animation films – including many films by Norman McLaren – and of experimental films. Our slide and photograph libraries are also a free loan service. Our catalogues and booking forms will be sent to you on request from 01-629-9492 ext. 284/215.



CANADA HOUSE FILM INFORMATION SERVICE keeps information on many Canadian films, film organisations, film festivals and film courses in Canada, producers, directors and distributors in Canada. If you have a query try us first on 01-629-9492 ext. 243.

Maison du Canada

ALL SCREENINGS START AT 6.30PM

ADMISSION FREE

CANADA HOUSE, TRAFALGAR SQUARE, LONDON SW1.

film/tv books 100s secondhand/ o.p. books/mags

catalogue: 50p stamps (3 intl postal reply coupons)

decorum books

24 Cloudesley Square London N1

contacts

Cinema Bookshop

24, RUE DU COLISÉE 75008 PARIS

TÉL. (1) 359.17.71

Cinemagoing

SIR,—Why are cinema attendances falling?

Because we happened to be in the West End yesterday, my wife and I decided to see a film while we were there. We chose *The Company of Wolves*, which had received some interesting reviews. The showing was advertised to open at 4.45 p.m., and at around 4.15 p.m. we arrived at the Odeon, Leicester Square, hoping to buy some tickets and then go somewhere for a cup of coffee. We found a long queue, and wondering if we would get in without queuing we decided to join it. After a wait of half an hour, we shuffled forward with everyone else, paying £4.70 each for our seats. Inside the theatre, we discovered that the actual showing did not begin until 5.15 p.m. We sat in the semi-darkness for about 25 minutes, listening to the sort of music they used to play on the Light Programme in the 1950s. At 5.15 a film began: it was apparently some kind of promotional film for a new record by David Bowie, with additional scenes added. It was badly directed and unconvincingly acted. There followed two or three previews, then commercials for refreshments. An intermission was announced. At this point we had been inside the theatre for an hour, and had been waiting for the film we wanted to see for about an hour and a half. When the lights finally went down, a large number of commercials were shown. Finally, at 6.00 p.m., an hour and a quarter after the advertised time, the main feature began. Many people in the audience gave an ironic cheer.

The seats were uncomfortable to sit in. The cinema was not properly ventilated, and although one small section was set aside for non-smokers the atmosphere was dense and smoky (and the seats were only half occupied). The film was projected in sharp focus, but the soundtrack was amplified far too much, and several scenes were deafening.

I did not enjoy the experience, and will never use that cinema again.

Yours faithfully,
CHRISTOPHER PRIEST
Harrow, Middlesex

The Method

SIR,—Now that we are a generation away, it is time that somebody writes a serious book-length study of the Method in American Film and its influences. I eagerly read Hal Hinson's article (SIGHT AND SOUND, Summer 1984), but became rather disappointed upon finishing it. If the writer meant to say that Marlon Brando may be the cinema's best actor, I can agree. The recent Paris revival of Mankiewicz's *Julius Caesar*

permitted me to check up on my teenage moviegoing memories. In 1984 Brando's Antony comes out as the one genuine portrayal, making even such infallible Britishers and Shakespearians as James Mason and John Gielgud appear stagey, and exposing one truly embarrassing Calpurnia-cameo by Greer Garson.

Hinson is accurate in his praise, but I'm not sure his 'attacks' are meaningful. As a title 'Some Notes on Method Actors' excuses his article, which has missing links and strange gaps. When the main item was Kazan-Brando-DeNiro, why was the Kazan-DeNiro connection, whether good or bad, in *The Last Tycoon* bypassed? Paul Newman's closer-to-the-Method parts in *The Left-Handed Gun*, *The Long Hot Summer*, *Somebody Up There Likes Me*, *The Hustler*, seem to have been deliberately left out. And where's James Dean? Although he made only three films, *East of Eden*, which I saw some eight times between then and now, is no doubt a Method diamond.

Hinson provokes a manipulative duel between Brando and DeNiro. We can confidently talk about 'the art of acting' in the theatre, but what is it on the screen? The way Brando-Bertolucci went to *Tango* is not so alien to what Morrissey-Warhol undertook with Joe Dallesandro in the *Flesh/Trash/Heat* trilogy. And there's the DeNiro-Bertolucci partnership for 1900. Montgomery Clift (Method?) in *Stazione Termini* was directed by the same De Sica who got an equally impressive performance out of Lamberto Maggiorani (Neo-Realist?) in *Bicycle Thieves*.

Hinson's displeasure with Scorsese-DeNiro is perhaps the very description of their qualities, for which we need a distance till 2001 to see better. If gaining weight helps his acting, that's DeNiro's personal possible choice. I'm sure the actor wouldn't go as far as blinding himself should he play Oedipus. It has nothing to do with a 'bankruptcy of imagination', any more than a realistic plastic-mould padding would summon a wealth of the same. After all, Brando, who now has that 50 lbs and more himself, slimmed down to thinner than Stanley Kowalski for his part in *The Night of the Following Day*. And he did put on false eyelids for his delightful Teahouse-Sakini, when with imagination he could simply follow that well-known anecdote of the actor, who on being praised for his make-up in playing an Oriental, replied that he simply went through his performance with eyes half closed.

Yours faithfully,
J. A. LIMAS
75005 Paris

Japanese

SIR,—Concerning the writing of Japanese names, would not an English-speaking person writing for other English-speaking people who always insisted on writing the names of the two most famous Hungarian composers of this century as Bartók Béla and Kodály Zoltán be regarded as insufferably pretentious? And yet that is how their names are given among Hungarians. After all, when the Japanese are writing for an English-speaking audience they give their names in our order, as do people such as Donald Richie, who has written a number of useful and informative books on Japanese cinema, and who actually has a close acquaintance with the country and its language.

Yours faithfully,
BARRY SALT
London W14

Iron Mask

SIR,—I would be interested to know whether there still exists a print of the original *Iron Mask* (Fairbanks Senior) with added sound. Fairbanks Junior told me that the original sound had to be scrapped when he made his own sound version with his own voice and new music. But surely someone somewhere must have a print of the original?

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

COLUMBIA-EMI-WARNER for *The Killing Fields*, *A Soldier's Story*.
20th CENTURY-FOX for 1984.
Under the Volcano, *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*.

UIP for *Red Dawn*.

ARTIFICIAL EYE for *Diary for My Children*, *Wise Blood*, *Don Giovanni*, *Nostalghia*, *Full Moon in Paris*.

CANNON-GALA for *Kaos*, *L'Amour par Terre*, *Maria's Lovers*.

CONTEMPORARY FILMS for *Stalker*.

VIRGIN FILMS for *The Great Rock 'n' Roll Swindle*.

PEH/THORN EMI SCREEN

ENTERTAINMENT for *Dreamchild*.

NFEC/CHANNEL 4/FIRST FILM

COMPANY for *Dance with a Stranger*.

EDGAR REITZ FILMPRODUKTION/

WDR/SFB for *Heimat*.

TRANS WORLD/RAI for *Claretta*.

GEA CINEMATOGRAFICA/IMPALA for *Camila*.

SYGMA AGENCY for *Ran*.

BRITISH FILM YEAR for BFI press conference.

BBC TV for *Four Days in July*.

STUART DOLLIN for *Imagining October*.

JOHN GALEY for *The House of Water*.

RICHARD TRAINOR for photograph of Michael Fitzgerald.

Also, is there a good print of the black and white silent version? The tinted copy shown on television last year was in an appalling condition.

A recent article in *The Fight Director* has aroused new interest in this film.

Yours faithfully,
HENRY MARSHALL
54 Belsize Park
London NW3 4EE

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

CATHARINA BLOMBERG, who is at present teaching at Harvard University, has lectured on Comparative Religion at the universities of Upsala, Umea and Gothenburg... MIKE BYGRAVE is a freelance journalist based in Los Angeles... HENRIETTA FOSTER is a production assistant for London Trust Productions...

JOHN GALEY grew up in Venezuela and has published articles on the film industry there in the *Caracas Daily Journal*... PETER GREEN is an architect working in Munich... RICHARD LEACOCK's most recent film is *Community of Praise* in the 'Middletown' TV series... RICHARD TRAINOR is a California-based freelance writer. His profile of Malcolm Lowry was due for publication in the *Saturday Review* to coincide with the American release of *Under the Volcano*.

FERRY RADAX for *Capri*—*Musik die sich entfernt*.

FILMKUNST for photograph of Ferry Radax.

TONY RAYNS for illustrations for article 'Chinese Changes'.

NICOLAS ROEG for photograph of François Truffaut on *Fahrenheit 451* location.

MIKE WESSEN for photograph of Ivor Montagu and Lord Bernstein.

BFI PRODUCTION for *My Ain Folk*, *Madonna and Child*, *The Gold Diggers*, *Flight to Berlin*.

NFA STILL COLLECTION for *Orphée*, *Le Testament d'Orphée*, *Man of Aran*, photographs of Robert Flaherty, Joseph Losey, François Truffaut, Oskar Werner.

PRINTED BY Centurion Print Ltd., Hertford, England.

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION RATES.

(4 issues) £6.60 including postage. Back issues £1.65 including postage and packing. U.S.A. \$14.00. Price per copy in United States \$3.50. Back issues \$3.50.

Binders to hold two years' issues £4.95, postage included (\$10.50).

SOLE AGENTS FOR U.S.A.: Eastern News Distributors, 111 Eighth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10011.

PUBLICATION DATES: 1st January, April, July, and October.

BLUE DOLPHIN

15-17 OLD COMPTON ST



FILM DISTRIBUTORS

LONDON W1V 6JR Tel: 01 439 9511

Philip Baker Hall in

ROBERT ALTMAN'S

SECRET HONOUR ⁽¹⁵⁾

"...A BRAVURA, BURNINGLY INTENSE PERFORMANCE THAT ALMOST BLOWS YOU OUT OF THE THEATRE"

"...TOO GOOD" L.A. Weekly

TO REMAIN A SECRET FOR LONG" Variety

OPENS EVERYMAN HAMPSTEAD
JANUARY 18

Patrick McGoochan Alexis Kanner

Andrea Marcovicci in
ALEXIS KANNER'S

KINGS AND DESPERATE Men ⁽¹⁵⁾

"IMPRESSIONISTIC, SUSPENSEFUL AND ARTFUL... MESMERIZING"

Charles Champion L.A. Times

OPENS IN LONDON'S WEST END
DECEMBER 28

My Brother's Wedding

A FILM BY CHARLES BURNETT

Eva Mattes Lisa Kreuzer
in RADU GABREA'S

A MAN LIKE EVA ⁽¹⁸⁾

A MAN WHO LOVES MEN AND WOMEN.

16mm DISTRIBUTION OF PALACE PICTURES

NEIL JORDAN'S THE COMPANY OF WOLVES ⁽¹⁸⁾

STARRING ANGELA LANSBURY
AND DAVID WARNER

PARIS, TEXAS

Directed by
WIM WENDERS

With
NASTASSJA KINSKI

Written by
SAM SHEPARD

HARRY DEAN STANTON

THE HIT ¹⁸

Starring JOHN HURT TIM ROTH
LAURA DEL SOL TERENCE STAMP
With BILL HUNTER FERNANDO REY

LAUGHTER HOUSE

"A GAGGLE OF LAUGHS"
Standard

"A BRITISH FILM TO BE
PROUD OF-DELIGHTFUL
ENTERTAINMENT"
Daily Express

The Country Girls

Starring SAM NEILL
Screenplay by EDNA O'BRIEN

FROM

MAO TO MOZART:

ISAAC STERN
IN CHINA

ACADEMY
AWARD
WINNER

CANNON 16mm FILM LIBRARY

BOB SWAIM'S

La Balance

ISABELLE ADJANI
ALAIN SOUCHON

ONE DEADLY SUMMER

JEAN BECKER

PAUL COX'S

Lonely Hearts

FEDERICO FELLINI'S

And the Ship Sails On

Jacques Rivette
L'AMOUR PAR TERRE

SHUNJI IMAI FILM

THE BALLAD OF NARAYAMA

ON NOW

● AMADEUS

(Columbia-EMI-Warner)
Peter Shaffer's play about musical rivalries in eighteenth century Vienna made tragedy-comedy (the emphasis varying depending on which version of the play one saw) out of Mozart's dying delusion that he was poisoned and court composer Salieri's dream that he had done it. It is all in the name: 'Amadeus', blessed by God with a creative genius which, given that Mozart is otherwise portrayed as a silly, giggling, smutty child, seems wholly undeserved. Shaffer's play had a similar punning construction: it was a spiralling fantasia for two voices, an intricate waltz of paranoia, delusion and Olympian, over-reaching jealousy. Milos Forman's film version tones down the theatrical effects and actually looks more conventionally stagebound than the original. Period recreation takes up more time and space, and the metaphorical aspect of the Mozart/Salieri play-off—soulmates and mortal enemies, yin and yang of the creative spirit—is plotted as a quite straightforward psychological tug of war. (F. Murray Abraham, Tom Hulce, Elizabeth Berridge.)

● GHOSTBUSTERS

(Columbia-EMI-Warner)
Some peculiar power has levitated *Ghostbusters*, a spook romp with half-joke, half-scary effects and a liberal smattering of *National Lampoon* low humour, into the heady realms of the all-time box-office champions. The ingredients are undeniably winning: the comic partnership of fanatically determined parapsychologists, slobbish Bill Murray, preppy Dan Aykroyd and boffinish Harold Ramis, works a treat (they are out to purge New York of a Pandora's Box of apparitions, but run into real trouble with a Sumerian demigod); and Sigourney Weaver, as the girl in peril, and Rick Moranis, as the little squirt, are perfect cut-outs. The whole is decidedly and pleasingly ragged—by no means a calculated, machine-tooled moneymaker. The final conceit, the demigod transformed into a giant cream-puff man, acts like a perfectly timed custard pie. (William Atherton; director, Ivan Reitman.)

● THREE CROWNS OF THE SAILOR

(BFI)
A spellbinding version of the Flying Dutchman myth that manages to evoke the full sweep of romantic seafaring lore, from Stevenson and Conrad to the Welles of *Lady from Shanghai* and *Immortal Story*, in Raul Ruiz's most accessible narrative to date. The visual style ranges

from *Quai des Brumes*-noir to tongue-in-cheek magic realism, with cinematographer Henri Alekan responsible for a dazzling array of special effects and playful point-of-view shots. But storytelling is once again Ruiz's main concern. The haunted mariner who tells his fantastic life story to a student is himself the channel through which countless others tell *their* stories; and even in the bars and brothels that punctuate his eternal voyage, it is the power of language that seduces and debauches. For those who have followed Ruiz's perverse career during the last ten years of hyperactivity in France, the mystery is why he should have invested this TV movie with such uncharacteristic fictive resonance. One clue may lie in the hero's discovery when he returns to his home in Valparaiso that he is believed dead. In this most elaborate of fictions, Ruiz has revealed himself as the exiled son of a Chilean sea captain.

THE AMBASSADOR

(Cannon)
The United States ambassador to Israel, in intervals between being cuckolded by PLO functionary and pursued by Moscow-paid assassin, manages to launch new Middle Eastern peace initiative. Not wild enough to be funny. (Robert Mitchum, Ellen Burstyn, Rock Hudson; director, J. Lee Thompson.)

ANNIE'S COMING OUT

(Enterprise)
Australian drama-doc in which 'hopeless case' teenager is rescued from mental hospital incarceration by devoted teacher. Respect for the real participants does not overcome a sense of excessive blandness. (Angela Punch McGregor, Tina Arhondis; director, Gil Brealey.)

BABY IT'S YOU

(Mainline)
Whether he's dramatising the constraints of class or the affective distinction between Sinatra and Sam the Sham, there's clearly no *wrong* side of the tracks for John Sayles. This cherishable slice of New Jersey graffiti finally mutates into American *amour fou*, after charting the coming-of-age sensibilities and styles of 60s romance. (Rosanna Arquette, Vincent Spano.)

BOLERO

(Cannon)
A thoroughly un-Ravelled, soft and coreless, largely laughless farce. Bo Derek is a reluctant virgin pining for dry-ice-and-neon ecstasy with a bullfighter gored in the groin. (George Kennedy; director, John Derek.)

GREMLINS

(Columbia-EMI-Warner)
It's no longer a wonderful life for the citizens of this snowbound studio recreation of a Capra small town. After establishing a mood of cutesy Americana with the appearance of a mysterious cuddly creature, Joe Dante has the insufferably lovable thing generate a malicious horde which

gleefully wrecks the community, the Christmas card ambience and the narrative coherence. An effective scattershot attack on co-executive producer Steven Spielberg's deadening benevolence. (Zach Gilligan, Phoebe Cates.)

THE ICE PIRATES

(UIP)
Flynn-style swashbucklers and Rathbone-style dastards cross swords in a universe where water is more valuable than gold. Crass and juvenile, but with an enthusiastic performance by space pirate Anjelica Huston and some endearing conceits (in particular a time warp that ages heroes and villains until the pirate captain's infant son is old enough to win the battle . . .). (Robert Ulrich, Mary Crosby, John Carradine; director, Stewart Raffill.)

KINGS AND DESPERATE MEN

(Blue Dolphin)
On this evidence, Patrick McGoochan and all-round first-time auteur Alexis Kanner have become casualties of the *Prisoner* TV series much as one used to talk of acid casualties. This is a routine hostage-suspense movie—long-gestating, long-shelved and long-winded, tricked out with doubtless meaningful obscurantism and much oblique oratory. (Andrea Marcovicci, Margaret Trudeau.)

MS. 45

(Palace)
Thana, a mute teenager regularly abused by obnoxious men, takes to wandering New York by night with her .45, executing various sexist. Abel Ferrara, the *auteur maudit* of *The Driller Killer*, presents the bluntest, most militant, feminist vigilante scenario conceivable. Economically shot on seedy locations, with a marvellously degenerate supporting cast and an exceptional jazz score, this is one of the outstanding exploitation movies of the 80s. (Albert Sinkys, Darlene Stuto, Jimmy Laine [Abel Ferrara].)

MY BROTHER'S WEDDING

(Blue Dolphin)
An ambitiously ambivalent essay on questions of black class and culture in Watts, which polarises its hero between his upwardly mobile blood kin and his downwardly spiralling soul brother. Maybe lower in raw energy than Charles Burnett's previous *Killer of Sheep*, but still a rare conundrum on lumpy black identity and integrity. (Everett Silas, Jessie Holmes, Ronnie Bell.)

PLACES IN THE HEART

(Columbia-EMI-Warner)
Robert Benton's sentimental journey back to his roots in the Texan 30s, with Sally Field doing another *Norma Rae* as an indomitable widow defying fate, the Depression and racial hatreds to work her farm and raise her children. Saved from gush by Nestor Almendros' admirably clean, sharp camerawork. (Lindsay Crouse, Danny Glover, John Malkovich.)

A PRIVATE FUNCTION

(HandMade)
Alan Bennett's rude and engaging farce takes the lid off postwar Yorkshire snobbishness. Having kidnapped an 'unlicensed' pig from some small-town worthies, a socially unacceptable chiropodist (Michael Palin) baulks at despatching the incontinent beast. Maggie Smith, the foot doctor's wife, stands marvellously on her dignity. (Denholm Elliott, Liz Smith; director, Malcolm Mowbray.)

REPO MAN

(Artificial Eye)
Almost indescribable mixture of SF, film noir and gritty social comment, as resolutely contemporary as *Diva* and as disarmingly hare-brained as *Feuillade* (if you can imagine the old serial king gone punk). Fast and funny, even if it doesn't add up to much, superbly shot by Robby Müller and with uniformly marvellous performances. A striking debut for director Alex Cox. (Emilio Estevez, Harry Dean Stanton, Tracey Walter.)

THE SHOOTING PARTY

(Curzon)
James Mason is superb as the weary aristocrat presiding over a weekend shooting party, composed of many a star, in Julian Bond's adaptation of Isabel Colegate's retrospective look at the upper classes and their servants on the eve of the 1914-18 war. Weightily prophetic, but acutely observant of sporting niceties. (Edward Fox, Dorothy Tutin, Gordon Jackson, Cheryl Campbell; director, Alan Bridges.)

STOP MAKING SENSE

(Palace)
Totally sensible, near-sensational state of the art concert movie. No need for added flash when the band's as image-smart, active and intriguingly stage directed as Talking Heads. Their multi-media mainman, David Byrne, collaborates with Jonathan Demme on the ultimate riposte to pop-promo doodling.

STRANGER THAN PARADISE

(Artificial Eye)
Tracing the alien (ex-Budapest, ex-Brooklyn) encounters of three eternally unassimilated dreamers on a halting, Wenders-style itinerary, Jim Jarmusch sketches a wry narrative triptych in brilliant monochrome. John Lurie stows his sax, revealing pleasingly self-parodic chinks in his slobbish, pork pie-hatted pose. (Eszter Balint, Richard Edson.)

STRIKEBOUND

(Mainline)
A polemic first feature by Richard Lowenstein about the first 'lock-in' strike by coalminers in Australia's history. Agnes and Wattie Doig, leading participants, appear themselves as presiding witnesses. It puts the case for the oppressed workers with no glossing of picket-line violence. (Chris Haywood, Carol Burns.)

THE NATIONAL FILM & TELEVISION SCHOOL

among the prizes our students won in 1984 were:

Best Foreign Student Film, American Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences:
MOTHER'S WEDDING (Jenny Wilkes) – a graduate film

At Chicago (Student Section):

Gold Plaque: HOSTAGE (Aisling Walsh) – a graduate film

Silver Plaque: DAY OF ATONEMENT (Steve Gough) – a graduate film

Certificate of Merit: THE WAR BEGINS (Brian Dunnigan) – a graduate film

Munich Student Film Festival:

President's Prize: ON FOREIGN SOIL (Anna Cnattingius)

At the Festival Tours Recontres Henri Langlois:

Grand Prix: LOS VALIENTES (Cavan Greenwood) – a graduate film

Special 'Fin d'Etudes' Prize: JOHN, LOVE (John Davis) – a graduate film

Prize for 'Mise en Scène': DAY OF ATONEMENT (Steve Gough)

Special Jury Prize: THE WAR BEGINS (Brian Dunnigan)

Special Mention: SNAKES 'N' LADDERS (Harry Hook) – a graduate film

At Uppsala International Short Film Festival:

Animation Prize: SECOND CLASS MAIL (Alison Snowden) – a graduate film

Short Fiction Prize: DUST DANCE (Lena Verdouri) – a graduate film

And Congratulations to Charles Patey who shared
the Most Promising Newcomer Award at
the International Wildscreen Film and Television Festival.

NATIONAL FILM & TELEVISION SCHOOL (DEPT. SS), BEACONSFIELD STUDIOS,
BEACONSFIELD, BUCKS. Telephone: (04946) 71234

THE ACADEMY CINEMAS

165–167 Oxford Street, London, W1

*The Critics' Circle Film Section
1984 Film Awards*

SPECIAL AWARD

*"For exemplary programming
over fifty years"*